DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 025 RC 023 228

AUTHOR McSwan, David
TITLE School at the Centre (SatC): A Pilot Project in North Queensland. Report One: Completion of Phase One, the US Visit and Visits to Australian Schools.
INSTITUTION James Cook Univ. of North Queensland, Townsville (Australia). Rural Education, Research and Development Centre.
PUB DATE 2001-10-00
NOTE 156p.; Also produced by the Northern Priority Country Area Program. Funded by the Department of Transport and Regional Services under the Community Partnerships with Regional Universities Program. Ivan Searston was project director.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC07 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Change; Educational Philosophy; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Indigenous Populations; *International Cooperation; Pilot Projects; *Rural Areas; *Rural Education; Rural Schools; *School Community Relationship; Service Learning
IDENTIFIERS *Australia (Queensland); Nebraska; *Place Based Education; Sense of Community

ABSTRACT

The School at the Centre pilot project in Queensland, Australia, seeks to assess the transferability to Queensland of the philosophy and practice of the Nebraska-developed School at the Center program. The pilot project consists of three phases: information gathering, planning, and implementation and evaluation. This report covers work done during phase one. The School at the Center program focuses on rural place, and its philosophy is characterized by two core statements: 20 percent of the curriculum should reflect place, both the immediate locality and the broader rural milieu; and this curriculum should make a contribution to the local community. During reciprocal visits by Australian and American personnel to Nebraska and Queensland rural schools and communities, it was noted that rural areas in both countries were in decline and had educational programs that discounted rural place in the curriculum. Numerous examples from the Nebraska program confirmed that meaningful activities stemming from locality can be embedded into curricula, and that when a school contributes to its community, the community will reciprocate and profit. Overall, it was felt that the Nebraska program was transferable to Queensland. Two chapters discuss an American perspective on the School at the Centre program and steps involved in implementing phase 2 of the program. Twelve appendices present bibliographic resources, project letters, and data gathered in phase 1. (TD)

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The Northern Priority Country Area Program

and

The Rural Education Research and Development Centre,
James Cook University.

School at the Centre

SatC

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A Pilot Project in North Queensland.

Report One:
Completion of Phase One, the US visit and visits to Australian schools.

OCT 2001

Project Director: Mr Ivan Searston
Principal Investigator: Dr David McSwan

SatC funded by the Department of Transport and Regional Services under the *Community Partnerships with Regional Universities Program*

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Synopsis

The School at the Centre Pilot Project, funded by the Department of Transport and Regional Services under the *Community Partnerships with Regional Universities Program*, seeks to assess the transferability of the Nebraskan *School at the Center* Progam philosophy and practice to the Australian schools context.

The Pilot Project consists of three phases. The first is an information gathering and dissemination phase, the second a planning phase with schools who volunteer to be a part of the Pilot Project, and the third is an implementation and evaluation phase.

This report covers work done to the end of phase one.

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Chapter 1.

Origin of the School at the Centre Project in North Queensland.

1.1 Background

The School at the Center Program, begun in 1992, is one of a suite of initiatives involved in the rural revival of the State of Nebraska in the U.S. These strategies have attracted the interest of both the Queensland State Government and the Australian Federal Government.

The School at the Center Program grew out of work done by a committee at the Center for Rural Affairs in Nebraska (CFRA was established in 1973). This committee focused on concerns about the role of public policy - including education policy - in the decline of family farms and rural communities. The School at the Center Program thus has a long pedigree of effective assistance in making schools more relevant and more able to contribute to their host rural communities.

School at the Center (SatC) is based on the notion that rural revival not only needs economic, social and environmental initiatives in the wider community to redress rural decline, but understands that, if these initiatives are to be sustainable, those who will make up the next generation will have to be educated into the process. In other words, there is a very real role for schools in this process of rural community building.

At the 1999 Queensland Positive Rural Futures conference, two people from the School at the Center in Nebraska, one being the Director of the program, spoke about the positive outcomes of the initiative in the Great Plains area of the United States.

Both these people were later involved in a seminar held in Ravenshoe, North Queensland, where local people were introduced to the School at the Center program in more detail. This seminar was organised by people involved in the Northern Priority Country Area Program (PCAP).

The close alignment of the focus of PCAP, the work of the Rural Education Research and Development Centre (RERDC) at James Cook University which maintains close contact with Northern PCAP, the aspirations of local rural people, and the objectives and the rigorous educational base of the School at the Center program, came together in a submission to the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services seeking funding to trial the School at the Center program in Australia.

1.2 Partners in the Project

1.2.1 Rural Education Research and Development Centre.

RERDC, founded in 1989, has been involved in research into rural and regional issues for over a decade. While the focus of RERDC has been mainly on education in rural areas, there has also been a wider remit that has included rural health (the Rural Health Training Unit rose out of initial work done in association with RERDC) and the broader field of Community Development and Rural Community Building.

RERDC has had significant impact on furthering knowledge about rural communities through its ongoing program of rural conferences that bring together university academics and rural people from across the world. The publication of proceedings from the 1994 Rural Issues Conference in Townsville continues to be widely used as a reference text in other Australian and United States universities. The information in the proceedings has also informed government decision-making. Proceedings from the recent (2000) World Rural Issues Conference in Canada (part of the RERDC program) are expected to have a similar impact.

Increasing contact with several U.S. universities also involved in rural issues, has indicated a real chance of making a difference in rural schooling through a developing partnership with those universities. This partnership, presently consisting of James Cook University, the University of Alabama, and Malaspina University College in B.C, (discussions are proceeding with other potential partners) has just seen the launch of an international Masters in Education post-graduate degree course that welds together aspects of rural education, community development, cultural understandings and educational enhancement in rural settings.

RERDC is itself funded through James Cook University and private subscriptions raised from the North Queensland community and businesses. Lady Pearl Logan is chair of the management board of RERDC.

1.2.2 *Local Area Committees of the Priority Country Area Program in North Queensland.*

The Priority Country Area Program, part of the federally funded Country Area Program, has, in North Queensland, devolved decision-making on project funding in its member schools to volunteer committees operating at a district level.

These volunteer committees are structured to ensure at least half of their membership is community based rather than being dominated by educators coming just from educational systems. The nine such committees from Bowen in the south to Thursday Island in the north are responsible for assessing projects and approving the expenditure of funds in excess of $1.2 million annually.

These committees, in a number of instances, play a wider community role than only decision-making about PCAP funding. To quote but one example, the committee based around Weipa, plays a significant support role in the annual CROC eisteddfod.

At a larger regional level, the committees have also played a significant role in the initiation and ongoing support of the Queensland Rural Futures Conference which local committee members like to believe, with some justification, had, in turn, some role in sparking the Regional Summit initiative of the Federal government in Canberra in October 1999.

Indeed, the keynote speaker at the Regional Summit (John Allen from Nebraska) had previously spoken at the Queensland Positive Rural Futures

Conference (May 1999) along with the two educators from the School at the Center Program in Nebraska. John has close links with School at the Center in Nebraska.

As previously mentioned, the volunteer committee for the local PCAP district to the west of Cairns (Tablelands Local PCAP Committee) subsequently organised a workshop about how schools could contribute to community revival that was addressed by these keynote speakers. The workshop was held in May 1999.

This initiative has generated ongoing interest in furthering the concept of how schools may contribute to their local communities using strategies informed by what is being done in the School at the Center (and other similar programs) in the U.S.

This interest was restated and reinforced by a meeting of parents and other rural community residents held in conjunction with the Queensland Positive Rural Futures Conference in Cooktown in May 2000.

1.3 Interest from Nebraska

There are strong personal links at the individual professional level as well as institutional interest - university-to-university - in this program.

At the personal level, both the project director of the SatC pilot in North Queensland and the Director of RERDC have had face-to-face meetings and continuing dialogue with several significant people active in rural school and community initiatives in the United States. Amongst these are people from *Foxfire*, the *PACERS Cooperative, REAL, the Annenberg Rural Challenge Program* as well as *School at the Center*.

Professionally, people from these programs, and others, have worked together for some time, a circumstance that has recently led to the formation of an international consortium of universities (described above) that offers a Masters degree in rural education covering much of the work done by these programs.

Further contact was made with the Director of School at the Center in Nebraska after he was in Australia in 1999 to explore the possibility of extending the link to Australia.

In the course of these discussions, the Director of School at the Center indicated a willingness to assist in translating what has been learnt in the U.S. SatC experience to Australian rural schools. The dialogue about other linkages including university partnerships is also ongoing.

It was this fortuitous coming together of these several developing strands that paved the way for the SatC pilot project in North Queensland. The final impetus for the trial was the support from the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services under their *Community Partnerships with Regional Universities Program* to fund the pilot across a small number of schools in the PCAP area in North Queensland.

1.4 What is School at the Center?

The core statement for School at the Center is that at least 20% of the curriculum should be an exploration of

> ***the Great Plains culture in music, the arts, literature, and the folk arts, local environmental and economic issues and local vocations.***

In other words, School at the Center is one of several initiatives that can be found in various places across the world that orient around a teaching and learning philosophy that comes under the label of 'place based education'. SatC is particularly focused on rural places.

SatC focuses both on the immediate locality and on the wider rural milieu - in the case of the parent organisation, *the Great Plains*.

This place-based philosophy about education is not new. It can be traced back throughout many past deliberations about what contributes to good educational practice. Rousseau saw the immediate locality as a lens for disciplinary engagement. And to show the broad relevance of the idea across cultures we need to go no further than the work of Paolo Freire in South America or Julius Nyerere in Africa. But there is also a growing volume of more recent work, in particular to writings of Paul Theobald and Paul Nachtigal.

School at the Center, and especially the planned Australian iteration of the program, moves beyond being merely another example of place-based education by adding another facet to its implementation in the classroom.

School at the Center strongly encourages schools and their students to use the curriculum to make a conscious contribution back to their host community.

In Nebraska, School at the Center offers a framework that could guide the identification of where such a contribution could be made. The framework is:

our earth
our civil good
our community heritage
our economy.

in practice, the identification of where a contribution might be made flows quite naturally from the School at the Center planning process used with schools, teachers, community members and students. This is because of the attention given to writing into the curriculum those characteristics of place that can act as the vehicle to convey the learning experiences that will generate the educational outcomes being sought in that curriculum. In the process of writing these strategies into the curriculum, it is our experience that those involved soon identify local issues with which they would like to be involved. And learning becomes more real and pertinent.

However, School at the Center does not go down the track of creating a 'folk curriculum', a criticism that has been levelled at some place-based educational initiatives. SatC is well aware that students have to take their place effectively in a modern and increasingly global world - hence the 20% guideline.

Further, a quick reconsideration of the goal of School at the Center stated above, shows that place is interpreted not only as the specific locality where the school is sited, but also the broader rural milieu. The 20% guideline becomes even more supportable when this is realised.

Looked at another way, in Australia, more than 20% of the population lives in rural places (as distinct from urban and regional provincial centres) so the suggestion that rural people should see themselves and their lifestyles and interests in 20% of the curriculum is not unreasonable by any stretch of the imagination..

To recapitulate:

Schools at the Center (in Australia we use the *Centre* spelling - in fact, the spellings are an indication of which program we are discussing) is one of several examples of place-based education. SatC unashamedly focuses on rural place, and is characterised by two core statements:

> ***A target of 20% of the overall curriculum should reflect place, both the immediate locality and the broader rural milieu.***
>
> ***There should be a conscious effort to use this curriculum to make a contribution to the local community.***

It is this core philosophy, devoid of the Nebraskan contextualisation, that makes the transferability of the program to the Australian context appear a reasonable prospect. This underpinned the development of the School at the Centre Pilot Project that is the subject of this report.

Chapter 2.

Formal Beginnings

2.1 The Contract

While the stage was set for some action, funding support was obviously a key prerequisite for any trial of the School at the Center Program in Australia and once an appropriate source of support was identified, meeting the terms of that funding body became the basic formal statement for the project.

Schedule 1 of the subsequent contract with the funding body outlines the scope of the pilot project:

SCHEDULE 1

PROJECT

1. Description of Project

The aim of the project is to conduct research which will pilot schools as contributors to community building strategies in regional areas.

2. Purposes/Goals and Objectives of Project

The project aims to pilot strategies translated and adapted to the Australian context from the School at the Centre and produce exemplars that demonstrate the positive contributions that schools can make to their host communities. The exemplars and what is learnt from the pilot will inform future initiatives and contribute to their success.

3. Evaluation of Project

Evaluation is keyed around production of exemplars and the development of processes and outcomes, including negatives and barriers identified. A final report and portfolio of several strategies that have proved successful will be produced.

Apart from the project report, provision has been made to engage an external

evaluator.

Evaluation by the Department shall:

(i) be in accordance with clause 7; and

(ii) be against the Project's goals and objectives as set out in Item 2 of this Schedule and the Programme set out in Schedule 5; and

(iii) take into consideration the Reports provided by the Grantee as specified in clauses 9 and 10.

A list of core milestones to be achieved were also identified in the contract:

SCHEDULE 2 - ANNEXURE A

Agreed Milestones for: *Community Partnerships with Regional Universities and TAFE's Sub-programme Grant*

Milestone	Target Date
Visit to the School at the Center Project in Nebraska to obtain first hand experience of the schools involved in that project.	31/12/2001
Visit to Australia by senior staff from the School at the Center Program.	31/12/2001
Implementation workshops	31/12/2001
Ongoing support for the initiatives that are developed in the pilot schools	31/12/2001

The contract also required that two reports be submitted to the Department of Transport and Regional Services.

The first (progress) report was made due by the end of January 2002 and was to deal with the period of activity from January 2001 to December 2001.

The terms of the reports were spelt out in the contract, namely:

The Grantee shall provide information in relation to each of the following, matters in each Report:

(a) whether the Work Program is being met;

(b) what progress or achievements have been made in the performance of the Project during the period to which the Report relates;

(c) what difficulties in performing the Project (if any) have been encountered by the Grantee during the period and the action proposed to be taken to overcome those difficulties;

(d) the proposed future plan of action to be taken in respect of the performance of the Project;

(e) a financial statement specifying any receipt of income and the manner in which, and the purposes for which, any Grant Funds paid by the Commonwealth and Grantee's Contribution during the period have been expended;

(f) a statement by the person or the position holder of the Grantee stipulated in Item C of Schedule 5 [Certification] or, where no person or position is stipulated, an appropriate person or position holder certifying that any such Grant Funds were expended in accordance with this Agreement; and

(g) such other matters as the Department may require by notice in writing to the Grantee.

While the final report due by March 1st 2002 would cover full acquital of the pilot project under the following terms:

(a) a comparison between actual outcomes and intended outcomes in a format suitable for publication as specified in the Work Program;

(b) where applicable, an explanation as to why any such intended outcome was not achieved;

(c) where applicable, recommendations on how any such intended outcome could be achieved in the future;

(d) an analysis of how the Project was carried out;

(e) the results of the Project which relate to Programme aims and how such results were evaluated;

(f) any significant material (Including promotional material) used or created in the course of the Project;

(g) an analysis of how the Project benefited rural communities generally and/or the specific community group which the Project was intended to benefit and for whom the Grant Funds paid by the Commonwealth were expended;

(h) a statement by the person or the position holder of the Grantee stipulated in Item C of Schedule 5 [Certification] or, where no person or position is stipulated, an appropriate person or position holder, certifying that such Grant Funds were expended in accordance with this Agreement;

(i) a statement by the person or the position holder of the Grantee stipulated in Item C of Schedule 5 [Certification] or, where no person or position is stipulated, an appropriate person or position holder, certifying that the Grantee's Contribution was received and expended in accordance with this Agreement;

(j) such other matter as the Department may require by notice in writing given to the Grantee.

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2.2 Timelines - variations from the Contract.

It should be noted that two variations to the planned Schedule of Works have been identified. The first variation concerns the visits planned both to and from the United States and the second is a change to the planned completion time of the pilot project.

2.2.1 Change in starting time.

In the initial proposal it was planned that a single person should visit the School at the Center schools in Nebraska, and two people from the Nebraskan program should visit schools in North Queensland as part of the initial familiarisation.

However, in the time between the costing of these proposals and the undertaking of the activities, the exchange rate between the United States and Australia had deteriorated to the extent that funds would not cover the visiting program in its original form. One person from each end would be all that funds would cover.

At the same time, it was realised that a greater benefit could be gained by having two people from Australia (where the pilot was being implemented) visit the School at the Center program in the United States, as one could support the other on return to Australia. It would be even better if at least one of these people had some familiarity with administrative protocols from within the education system in Queensland.

Therefore, support from outside the funding parameters of this contract was sought with this end in mind and a combined PCAP/Education Queensland (EQ) arrangement was negotiated for a senior staff member from EQ to accompany the person funded through the SatC contract to the United States.

This first variation therefore allowed two people to visit the U.S. and one School at the Center staff member - this being the Director of the U.S. program - to visit Australian schools.

2.2.2 Change in completion date

The second variation was to the timelines associated with the implementation of the North Queensland pilot.

Initially, it was planned that the U.S. visits would take place in late 2000, however, approval for the pilot did not come from the Department of Transport and Regional Services until November 2000. This precluded making the visits to the U.S. as schools in Nebraska at that time were in the dead of winter and generally snow-bound, making the possibility of school visits remote. This meant that the planned visits had to be delayed until it was possible to physically visit the demonstration schools.

This was done at the earliest opportunity in 2001, however even when the visits began (April 2001) a late snowfall almost disrupted some parts of the visitation program.

Further, even though the Director of the School at the Center program made his visit to Australia within a week of the Nebraskan visit being completed so as to recover some time in the planned schedule of implementation, the delay

to the essential first steps of the pilot program caused by approval running into winter effects in the U.S., set the trial back by almost five months.

On the positive side, this delay has allowed the School at the Centre Pilot Program in North Queensland to be more closely integrated with other significant events in Queensland.

The first significant event was an invitation to the Positive Rural Futures Conference in Sarina in May 2001 to promote the project to rural people from across Queensland.

The second was being able to tie in with the July 2001 Northern PCAP conference to conduct workshops with rural community representatives and school staff as part of the proceedings of that conference. This also allowed a closer partnership to be fostered with the PCAP communities over and above what already existed.

In addition, while the delay in the implementation schedule also gave rise to potential problems with school holidays around December/January, it was soon realised that using by breaks in the school year as natural splits between planned stages of the pilot, increased attention could be given to grounding the implementation more firmly into the curriculum.

This grounding was something that demanded extra development time which would become available in the latter part of 2001 when the mid-year holiday break was used as a natural split between planning and implementation stages. This would not preclude schools that were well advanced with planning to begin implementation before the 2002 year.

This change in the implementation schedule also made more obvious that the whole pilot project divided neatly into three phases.

These were: a preliminary phase of visits and laying of foundations; a planning phase where schools identified activities that could be incorporated into curriculum along the lines suggested by the School at the Center philosophy and which could contribute to their host community; and the actual implementation of these activities and their evaluation.

These three phases covered the time periods March - July 2001 (Phase 1), August to November 2001 (Phase 2); and January to May 2002 (Phase 3).

In practice, this meant a variation from the initial completion time of March 2002 to July 2002.

This present report is linked to the end of Phase 1.

2.3 JCU Ethics Approval

A separate formal procedure related to James Cook University of North Queensland's own ethical standards. This necessitated an application to the University's ethics standards committee to oversight and approve the planned activities in relation to the School at the Centre Pilot Project.

This application was considered by that committee and the required clearance given to undertake the activities that were related to the implementation of the contract.

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY
Townsville QLD 4811 AUSTRALIA

ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE
(Human Ethics sub-Committee)

APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH OR TEACHING INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	*David McSwan*
SCHOOL	*RERDC School of Education*
PROJECT TITLE	*School at the Centre Queensland*
DATE	*28 March 2001 – 31 December 2001*
CATEGORY	*1*

This project has been allocated Ethics Approval Number
With the following provisos and reservations: **H 1182**

1. All subsequent records and correspondence relating to this project must refer to this number
2. The Principal Investigator is to advise the responsible Monitor appointed by the Ethics Review Committee
   - Periodically of the progress of the project;
   - When the project is completed or if suspended or prematurely terminated for any reason
   -
3. In compliance with the National health and medical Research Council (NHMRC) *"National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans"* you are required to provide an annual report detailing security of records and compliance with conditions of approval. The report should very briefly summarise progress

NAME OF RESPONSIBLE MONITOR	*Dr Pamela Matters*
SCHOOL	*Education*

[forwarded by E-mail without signature]

Tina Langford
Ethics Administrator

Ph: 4781 4342
Fax: 4781 5521
Email: Tina.Landgord@jcu.edu.au

DATE *28 March 2001*

Principal Investigator Ethics Number H1182

Ref: _APPROVALS/Human/2001/03_01/H1182

Ethics approval

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Along with that clearance, a short description of the pilot project was prepared to act as a formal introduction to the project so that project participants would be able to give informed consent to their involvement in the project - another part of the ethical standards required to be met by James Cook University of North Queensland.

A consent form would be completed after schools had elected to volunteer for inclusion in the pilot project - the formal acknowledgment being made at the PCAP conference in July 2001.

Information Sheet
School at the Centre North Queensland

This project aims to translate into a specific area (NPCAP area) established community building strategies based on schools as contributors to rural communities in which they are situated. The Project is based on the successful School at the Centre Program in Nebraska, U.S. and addresses the needs for rural community revival, community vitality and sustainability.

The project is a partnership between RERDC at James Cook University, Northern Priority Country Area Program and the School at the Centre Program in Nebraska, U.S.

The project consists of five activities:

(i) A visit (one person) to the School at the Centre Project in Nebraska to obtain first hand experience of the schools involved in that project. This visit will allow visions, goals, outcomes and philosophical statements to be generated in conjunction with U.S. personnel actively involved at the school level in the School at the Centre program.

(ii) A visit to Australia by a senior staff member from the School at the Centre Program which has two purposes. The first is to visit a selection of rural schools in North Queensland to gain first hand knowledge of the contexts in which they operate so that the work completed in the U.S. can be reviewed and made more appropriate to the North Queensland context. Schools will include School of the Air, one teacher rural schools, primary and secondary schools, but exclude schools in any population centre over 20,000.

The second part of this activity involves the conduct of district workshops to introduce significant local people, including senior administrators in the education systems, to the North Queensland S-at-the-C strategies. Key workshops will be held across local PCAP districts and two will be targeted at trainee teachers at James Cook University campuses at Townsville and Cairns.

(iii) Implementation workshops. Once the key workshops have been conducted, workshops at the individual school level are to be conducted for schools that have volunteered to continue to be part of the pilot project. For practical reasons a limit of up to 20 schools is envisaged.

(iv) Further support. The last part of the pilot consists of supplying ongoing support for the initiatives that are developed in the pilot schools. Lessons learnt from the U.S. experience indicate that a characteristic of successful implementation of school programs based on rural community building require assistance and support from outside the educational systems.

Evaluation is keyed around production of exemplars and the development of processes and outcomes, including negatives and barriers identified. A final report and portfolio of several strategies that have proven successful will be produced. Apart from the project report, provision has been made for external evaluation.

Information page

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JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

TOWNSVILLE Queensland 4811 Australia Telephone (07) 4781 4111

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

SCHOOL : *Education*

PROJECT: *School at the Centre Queensland*

CHIEF INVESTIGATOR: *Dr David McSwan*

CONTACT DETAIL: *RERDC School of Education, James Cook University*

Ph:0747814929 fax:0747251690

DESCRIPTION:

The School at the Centre Queensland project aims to involve NPCAP volunteer committees, associated schools and other schools in a pilot project which aims to translate established community building strategies based on schools as contributors to rural communities in which they are situated. The long-term outcome of this approach has been effective in revitalising rural communities and retaining youth.

CONSENT

The aims of this study have been clearly explained to me and I understand what is wanted of me. I know that taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time and may refuse to answer any questions.

I understand that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval.

Name: *(printed)*	
Signature:	**Date:**

WITNESSED BY RESEARCHER OBTAINING CONSENT

Name: *Ivan Searston*	
Signature: *(Principal Investigator)*	**Date:**

Campuses at - TOWNSVILLE (07) 4781 4111 CAIRNS (07) 4042 1111 MACKAY (07) 4957 6048

Consent Form

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2.4 Revisiting the Preliminary Planning: Identification of Participant Schools

After advice of funding support was received from the Department of Transport and Regional Services, the possible participant schools were examined in greater detail. Several questions were posed and a position statement placed before the Area Management Committee for Northern PCAP for endorsement.

The statements considered included:

1. Distance and cost might preclude the more isolated parts of Northern PCAP considering the funding available.
2. A cultural overlay may complicate the piloting of what appears to be predominantly a White Anglo Saxon Protestant oriented model (SatC, Nebraska). It would be best to assess transferability of the program in similar communities before involving different communities. It was noted that SatC Nebraska was working with First Nation communities and city Latino schools but was still evaluating these initiatives.
3. Communities with a proportion of non-WASP could be included.
4. What size of school is best suited to SatC? For example, a one teacher school generally services a low population district rather than any real community agglomeration.
5. This implies a further question - is a community, in the sense of a town, necessary for SatC to work effectively?
6. This in turn gives rise to other questions about community characteristics. Is there any 'readiness' component? Places where human/social capital already exist might be more optimum.
7. Need a range of school and community characteristics to check transferability, but not high risk situations such as pending school closure or other major school disruption.
8. Ideally, it would be best to work with schools that volunteer to be part of the pilot project rather than schools who join for other reasons.

The position statement (APPENDIX 1) was endorsed by the Northern PCAP Area Committee in March 2001 and a short list of potential volunteer schools was then drawn up.

The Director of the School at the Center program in Nebraska also contributed to this discussion and endorsed the direction being taken in the position statement. (APPENDIX 2).

In summary, the following points were endorsed.

First, there was the constraint of finance. The funding program that was targeted for support had an upper limit of $50000. This obviously meant the trial would have to be small to be achievable.

Second, the introduction of too many variables could defeat the purpose of a trial project - that of examining the transferability of the U.S. School at the Center program into Australian conditions. What better place to start than in the closest analogue to the American situation - mainstream rural communities in Australia. This would best allow for transferability to be judged without too many other distractions.

Third, and here the reference to the PCAP communities is explained, it would be better to conduct the trial in communities that had some degree of 'readiness' - communities that were

already heading in the general direction of the School at the Center philosophy. The PCAP communities of North Queensland were in this situation.

And once the decision was made to target the mainstream PCAP communities and schools in North Queensland, another series of decision had to be made about which ones of the seventy plus PCAP schools and communities would be involved - again, funding was the constraint.

However, rather than identifying schools individually, characteristics of schools were used to ensure a wide representation of school types. The first characteristic used was school size to which other characteristics were added resulting in the following list that covered all major school characteristics of the PCAP (and rural) schools.

One teacher school	2
Smallish primary school	2
Large primary school	1
Catholic Ed	2
School of Distance Education	1
P-10 split campus	1
P-10 same campus	1
P-12	1
8-12 secondary	1

Further suggestions widened the list to include a private school, some schools outside the PCAP area, and rather than exclude cultural differences completely, some schools with a significant indigenous population.

Geographic spread was then used as a second overlay, and based primarily on cost of access, four geographic clusters were proposed. One was based around Cooktown, a second was on the Atherton Tablelands, a third around Charters Towers and a fourth at Collinsville. In all, this gave a total of just over 20 schools to canvass with School at the Centre information.

Cooktown cluster: Cooktown Rossville Lakeland Downs	**Charters Towers cluster:** SoDE Mingela Ravenswood Alliance of Charters Towers Schools Blackheath and Thornburgh College
Tableland cluster: Julatten Mt Molloy Herberton Irvinebank *plus* Babinda	**Collinsville cluster:** Collinsville High Collinsville Primary Scottsville St John Bosco

Fourth, the decision was also made that these schools should elect their level of involvement with the pilot program. Some schools, might, in fact, even elect not to take part.

2.5 Initial Information Flow to Identified Schools

At the same meeting of the Area Management Committee of Northern PCAP, members saw a Powerpoint presentation about SatC (APPENDIX 3) and representatives from each of the local PCAP committees received an information pack (APPENDIX 4) to be passed on to the local schools in their area that had been identified as possible pilot schools.

The information pack contained an overview of what School at the Center was, what it would look like in its Australian iteration. It also contained information about how SatC fitted with current educational thinking in both the broader national sense and at the state level - for example with the Adelaide Declaration and PCAP Federal guidelines; and with Queensland's 2010 agenda and outcomes based education philosophy.

The pack also contained some material of a more general persuasive nature and a proposed timeline for implementation of the pilot project.

Shortly after this, schools were contacted individually to make sure they had each received the information pack. Two forms of contact were made. A formal letter was posted to each of the identified schools to invite each to confirm their interest in being part of the initial information dissemination phase of the pilot project, including hosting a visit from Jerry Hoffman, the Director of School at the Center in Nebraska. This was backed up by an email to the principal giving the dates of Jerry's time in Australia and some World Wide Web sites that could be of interest. (APPENDIX 5).

Schools were also phoned shortly after so that day-by-day planning for Jerry's visit could be completed and actual dates advised to schools.

At the same time, District Directors were advised and their approval sought for the first phase of the pilot project - in particular for the visit of Jerry Hoffman to schools. Initial contact had been made with four Directors at the Area Management meeting of Northern PCAP - these were the Director of Cape and Gulf, the Director of Townsville and West, the Director of Tablelands and Johnstone, and the Director of Catholic Education for North Queensland. Two of these Directors are part of the Area Management Committee of Northern PCAP and the other two have close association with PCAP. All were aware of School at the Center from earlier PCAP initiatives and discussions at previous meetings dating back as far as 1997.

In fact, the two Directors who were on the Area Management Committee of Northern PCAP played a very strong and supportive role in ensuring their systems endorsed the SatC pilot project.

The only other District Director (Mackay) with whom personal discussions had not taken place was contacted by phone and his approval obtained.

Chapter 3.

Implementing Phase 1: School Visits

3.1 A Visit to Schools Involved with School at the Center in Nebraska.

3.1.1 Preparation for the trip

Preparation for the Nebraskan trip had begun soon after the advice on successful funding had been received from the Department of Transport and Regional Services.

The initial suggestion was that this trip should take place as soon as possible into the new year (2001), however, advice from the Director of School at the Center about the uncertain travel times because of snow delayed the trip until April. This was felt to be the earliest that visits to schools in Nebraska would be less likely to be disrupted because of weather conditions. As it was, a late snowfall on the first three days of the trip in April went near to truncating some visits. (APPENDIX 6).

A preliminary schedule of visits was also assembled.

From: "Jerry L. Hoffman" <jh50022@alltel.net>
To: "'Ivan & Mary Searston'" <searston@tpg.com.au>
Subject: RE: US visit
Date: Mon, 29 Jan 2001 08:57:37 -0600

Great to hear from you, Ivan! Happy New Year to you, also.

Anytime is fine. I should say, however, that the end of February into March is uncertain travel times due to snow storms. For instance, we are awaiting a huge snow storm now that will drop about one foot of snow within 12 hours. After Easter may work better because it begins to warm up, and we are out of the snow season.

I say this because we would do quite a bit of travel throughout Nebraska and into South Dakota. I would feel bad if we made arrangements and then couldn't travel because of snow.

Larry Long is doing his community celebration work in Henderson May 4 - 8. Henderson is a German-Mennonite community of 999 persons. You may want to include this celebration in your trip. It is quite an event. Jack has used Larry in much of his work in Alabama. If this is of interest, then plan a trip to begin after Easter in April.

You can either start your trip in Western Nebraska and South Dakota by flying into Denver, CO and driving to Morrill, Nebraska. Morrill is the Western office of School at the Center. My colleague, Chuck Karpf, would be a good host. He can take you to Arthur, where the students have opened a grocery store cooperative, and Tryon, where the students will be running the first community-based credit union in the towns history. Both are ranching communities located in isolated sections of the Sandhills. You can then travel to Chadron, where Ed Nelson used to live and work. Visiting with Chadron State College faculty and the president would give you a sense of how we work with tertiary institutions. Then, you can travel to Sturgis, South Dakota and meeting with Curt Shaw. Curt is the resident youth entrepreneurship expert. You may know him through Rick Larson and REAL. We could do a videoconference between Sturgis and Lincoln at this point, and hear about what you're learning.

Then, you can fly from Rapid City, South Dakota to Omaha, Nebraska for your Eastern Nebraska visit. It is nearly a 12 hour drive, if you prefer to travel by car. Nevertheless, I can arrange several visits on the Eastern side of the state, including two of the four Indian Tribes where I am doing some work. I would also like to have you present your work at a Teachers College seminar, perhaps for an hour or two.

Let me know if there is anything in particular you have in mind for this trip.

Peace, Jerry

Some modifications to this preliminary schedule were necessary with the unavailability of Curt Shaw from REAL, but a penultimate schedule was assembled by 10th March with the actual trip planned for 20th April to 7th May. (APPENDIX 7).

3.1.2 Additional visitor from Education Queensland

During the planning stage for the U.S. trip, the value of having someone from Education Queensland taking part in the trip was recognised, particularly if that person had some first hand experience in one or more of the identified pilot schools and also had administrative experience in the Queensland Education system.

It was felt that administrative experience would be particularly important to be able to interpret differences between what was administratively possible - how system demands could shape implementation - in the Nebraskan schools compared with Queensland schools.

While it was planned to invite both Catholic Education and a private school to consider involvement with the SatC pilot project in North Queensland, the preponderance of Education Queensland schools in the pilot project also underpinned canvassing someone from EQ to accompany the Project Director from Australia on the Nebraskan trip.

From staff at the possible pilot schools, the deputy principal, David Prete, at Herberton State School was initially approached. David had experience in small schools within PCAP areas, was now a senior school administrator in a larger PCAP school that covered both primary and secondary components of schooling, and at a school that also had an indigenous component in the enrolment. The school had a cohort of students who were boarders - at Woodleigh Residential College. That is, David's experience appeared to cover the widest possible list of the characteristics of schools that were targeted for invitation to consider being part of the pilot project.

It was also known that David had a personal interest in School at the Center and like programs and had already applied for consideration for a study tour under the Churchill Fellowship Scheme.

An approach to the relevant District Director to canvass the possibility of David's accompanying the Project Director to Nebraska gained a positive response, and a check with the principal of the school at which David was deputy also gained a positive response. In brief, arrangements were made for David to join the visit to Nebraska and a Performance and Reporting Contract was prepared in line with EQ proceedures. (APPENDIX 8).

That these arrangements could be made is but one of many demonstrations of how much support exists for the School at the Centre Pilot Project within organisations involved in education of rural students. This support was demonstrated over and over again as the first phase of the pilot program unfolded. There is every reason to expect that support to continue as phase two begins.

Jerry Hoffman, the Director of School at the Center in Nebraska, also provided further briefing notes for both visitors (APPENDIX 9) who left Cairns for Nebraska on the 20th April 2001.

3.1.3 The Nebraskan experience - visits to schools

In brief, visits were made to eight schools that were involved in the Nebraskan School at the Center program, and meetings were held with ten organisations that had some involvement with the program either as active partners in projects or as supporters of the program in general. In some cases, more than one meeting was held with a school or an organisation - for example with people at different campuses of the same school, or at different sites where activities were taking place.

Time was also taken to walk the main streets and drive around the communities of the schools that were visited to gain some idea of the local infrastructure, business activity and general 'atmosphere' of each place.

The following notes were assembled from the diaries of the visits kept by both Australian visitors.

School	Place	Comment
Hay Springs	Near Chadron in north western Nebraska	A P-12 school. 170 students, budget $1.6m U.S., has a superintendent and principal, extensive involvement with SatC. Innovative manual arts program, lots of design and construction re furniture, rockets, go-karts, park benches for the golf course, a complete car that is stripped and put back together. Learning Centres in manual arts. Major project: students designed and built a house down from the school, currently for sale for $70 000. Students and teachers did everything i.e. purchase and design, foundations, carpentry, wiring, plumbing, plastering, painting. Also constructing a disabled toilet and new office for the superintendent and small conference room. Video about Hay Springs entirely produced by students, i.e. song lyrics, music, dialogue, vision etc. School has an auditorium i.e. stage, band pit, concert seating. Stage is also a timber floored basketball court. Basketball team plays their games on this court. Tour of school included an 'open' classroom - 60 elementary children, housed in one large open classroom, all resources (i.e. library, I.T. etc) housed throughout also. Teachers had used shelving etc to divide the open plan into what they felt were more useable and intimate areas. Took up to lunch in the dining hall - had corn dogs, yellow cheese, macaroni salad, salad, 1% fat coffee flavoured milk. High school kids were having lunch too. Start at 8.00 am, go to 3.00 pm, 25 mins break for lunch (only break all day - no play time - super said if it was any other way there'd be a lot more behavioural problems. When kids finish lunch they retire to the 'The Pit' - a sunken conversation area nearby. Bell rang and they all instantly moved to class. School lunches cost $1.50 /day - elementary; $1.75/day - high school, federally supported. Behavioural Management Plan is being rewritten from a values perspective, "Impossible to cover all contingencies if written in any other way" (Superintendent).

		Distance learning facilities i.e. video conferencing room (8 monitors, two cameras, data projector, 8 or more mikes, fibre optic cabling) $75 000 to set up. 50 or so have been put into schools throughout the state. Schools broadcast lessons to each other in real time. **Also noted that there were schools channels on T.V. e.g. Scottsbluff had a channel called *EDAC 11 Educational Access - Scottsbluff schools*. Another channel was *EDAC 12 Educational Access - Gering schools*. They broadcast what is happening at local schools as well as educational/curriculum content**
Banner	East of Hay Springs	Banner School is a one room, one teacher school with 5 students. Clark Gardener, our host for this part of the trip and who is head of the Education Faculty at Chadron State College (the university at Chadron) also acts as the Principal of this school and one other. Asked by the boards of both schools to be their principal. Dirt road access, muddy after the snow. Students use the dirt road for athletics practice so they can take part in a small schools athletics meeting.
Lyman and Henry	Near Scottsbluff	These are schools closed under the policy of consolidation. Lyman, population 400 High School sold for $8000, two storeyed brick building 12000 - 15000 square feet, rates $20. Bought by mechanic to use a shed for his business, main building empty. Grade School sold for $5000, 10000 square feet, Rates $2.35/$1000 of valuation. Declining population Henry, population 140 K-6 school closed. Obvious signs of a town under threat of extinction.
Morrill	Near Scottsbluff	A P-12 school on separate but nearby campuses. Like Hay Springs, the high school also has a community construction component to their Industrial Arts curriculum. 1st house - sold $57 000, 2d house - $63 000, Duplex - sold for $130 000 rented for $1000/month School had an old panel van to take tools, a trailer etc to building sites. Students drive own cars. Some students can get their licences as young as 14 - restricted, can only use it to drive to school. Senior students can attend industrial college or do extension work from Chadron State College. These count for both graduation requirements from school and credit at the College. Senior students were debating an education bill presently in front of state legislature. They were dumb-founded at the centralised system we described for Queensland. Emphatically in favour of local control. The other characteristic of both Morril campuses was the large entry foyers that gave a very welcoming atmosphere to visitors - more like a large motel reception area. The other characteristic that gave a different 'feel' to the schools was the layout of classrooms opening off from both sides of central hallways. While this was understandable from the point of snow and climate control, it seemed to give an atmosphere of greater focus on education. Queensland schools usually have an external access verandah that promotes a more outward focus.

Potter	South east of Scottsbluff and more in the south west of Nebraska	Town population of 450. K-12 school arranged as K-4 in Potter, 5-8 in the neighbouring community of Dix (local answer to prevent physical consolidation of that school with Potter), and 9-12 in Potter. The high school offers a Community Course Elective in their curriculum open to all students from 9-12 and operated as a composite class. Students take part in working on town projects e.g. signs, cleanups, beautification, etc. Senior student with high academic interests said it was a nice relief from an otherwise heavy workload and he enjoyed getting out and doing something for his town. Very strong community interest in the school. Local banking family among the supporters. Also strong community building focus willing to invest in town e.g village owned café, golf course.
Arthur	Central Nebraska in the Sandhills country - characterised by ranches and cattle. Invited to a roundup while there. School modifies program to allow seniors to take part in roundups which are a community sharing tradition.	K/1/2 - 12 students; 3/4/5/6 - two composite classes of 9 and 6 students respectively. High school (years 7 to 12 - approximately 60 students) in a separate building. Arthur school started own grocery store in the town. The following notes come from an interview with a Year 11 student at Arthur High who was involved in starting the store: 1. Wanted to create closer ties with the community; 2. Surveyed community about having a store in the town and district of 300 people; 3. 5 students in Action group - like a mini community development group rather than a class. 4. Sourced an old house, rented from owner 5. Took a day off school, painted, reshingled - all 50 students, teachers, community members. Called the shop Wolf's Den Market after the school mascot. 6. Business plan worked out with Scott Trimble and Chuck Karpf 7. Advertised for manager/operator 8. 2 students and 3 community members interviewed applicants. 9. Legal requirement to form a co-op 10. Now have videos for hire, and a few people have begun to have coffee up there; 11. Started planning for store when this student was in Year 7 12. Profits to school to reinvest in local community and scholarships for students. Distance Learning room $6500/year running costs Calculus Counselling Adult courses Marriage counseling Budget for school $1.3 m.
Tryon	East of Arthur in the Sandhills.	Visited the High School , Years 9-12 with 48 students 7 teachers College credit subjects - Algebra, English. Spanish is one of subjects taught via distance learning classroom. We sat in on a lesson linking four schools - Tryon, Arnold, Paxton, Wheatland Credit Union (community program) - seniors started attending community meetings - Chuck (ex banker) laid groundwork to begin Credit Union - employs one person to manage - has deposits of $900 000.

Ord	Eastern edge of Sandhills country	Ord Pop. 2200, school population 550, $4m. budget Students were boarding a bus for the National Range Judging in Kansas - 49 states involved - 5 teams from each state, 4 per team, Year 9-12. - Must be able to recognise good and bad pasture and natural vegetation and ways to encourage/control. College courses and Adult Ed. courses at the school - e.g. nursing, administration. Uni. Of Nebraska, Kearney hosts the ESU center. Saw an Industrial Arts Technical Work Center, 13 stations, 4 days/station, start in Junior High i.e. Year 7/8. Students were exploring current technology e.g. alternative power, rocketry, vehicle design. Robi Kroger - curriculum development for SatC, looks after PD of teachers involved in SatC SatC sponsored 'Student Extravaganza' - community services - community integrated curriculum - showcase student/community centred activities - e.g. student-led renovation of the school, (compare also Hay Springs) **The extravaganza is entirely different in concept from the Student Forum idea being pushed in Australia. The extravaganza works on the idea of getting together to share what has been done at different schools. Students rapidly take control, learn from each other and decide to do new things or duplicate successes. The Australian idea gets students together to plan to do something under the guidance of a 'facilitator'.** Jennifer Kroger Student Year 6 - entrepreneurial class - create our own business, led by Robi K and Curt Shaw 1. make something 2. define community 3. what are our resources 4. produced video tapes (Ord History Association, Alumni presentation) Banker approved/denied business plan, students had to pay interest Advertising - media, radio, cable TV 'Mind Your Own Business' - entrepreneurial program Students involved in Heritage Day at Fort Hardstaff, and plans for youth centre.
Albion	East of Ord into the crop farming country	A K-12 school. Discussed science/environmental studies with a group of students and their mentors who included adults from the community. Superintendant drove us and a group of students to Olsen Nature Preserve, a 77 acre bequest of ex farming country 9 miles from the school. This land is now the centre of environmental studies, camping excursions etc for the school. It is helped by people from the Prairie Plains Resource Institute and local people. Had breakfast at the school next morning at 7.00am as guests of the Year 4-5 Art class. Took our place in the queue along with other students as part of the 'free lunch' program. Met with the superintendent and visited classes doing English, Social Studies, History. The upper primary grades and their teachers are strongly focused on School at the Center ideas of place and community contribution.

3.1.4 *What did we find?*

In general, we found a very strong sense of community in these schools and the towns in which they were situated. Two words would describe the general approach to getting things done - self-reliant and self-determining. People did not wait for someone else to do things for them.

People in the schools came up with ideas, developed curriculum around these ideas, and got going. If help was forthcoming from elsewhere, as was often the case, this was welcomed with open arms but lack of external help was not viewed as a limiting factor to doing.

School at the Center often played a supportive role as the activities developed, to ensure easier implementation. This support ranged from professional development about the SatC philosophy, to advice and assistance with the curriculum development, to facilitation of strategic contacts with others who might support the school initiatives, to financial and specific professional services as in the Credit Union project.

This highlighted a second finding. Schools had the legislative ability to collect funds from local land-owners in much the same way as Local Councils levy rates in Queensland. This money accounted for the majority of the funds that schools could use for annual operations.

There was far less access to either State or Federal funds to assist with the operation of schools, something in stark contrast to the state (and federally) funded regime in Queensland.

Under this system of local levies to fund school operations, poorer school districts had a harder time collecting funds - they simply had to set a lower levy for it to be affordable and this applied to most of the schools in the rural areas we visited. The result showed in lower levels of school maintenance, lower teacher salaries, and schools having to make do with own resources.

However, what was particularly noticeable was the volume of private money from philanthropic organisations that could be accessed by schools for particular purposes, especially ones that were aimed at contributing to excellence in education. In fact, School at the Center acted as a conduit for some of this money. The contrast in regard to private financial support with the Australian situation was stark.

3.1.5 *Visits to other organisations*

As well as schools, a number of other organisations were visited in the communities travelled through.

The first major meeting was with the Chancellor of Chadron State College, the main university campus in Western Nebraska. Ed Nelson (who was one of the visitors to North Queensland in 1999) had been Chancellor of this University for a number of years and the new incumbent offered support and best wishes. Unfortunately, Ed had since passed away and so the personal link could not be renewed.

The head of the Education faculty was the main contact and he acted as host and guide for the visits to Hay Springs and Banner schools. He also headed *the Panhandle Center for Rural and Small School Education* and supplied some copies of the Center's newsletter. He also arranged for a press release and an interview with a local jounalist regarding the link between Chadron College and School at the Centre.

At Scottsbluff in western Nebraska, a meeting was held with the Panhandle Area Development Bureau. Discussion ranged across the role of transport infrastructure, tourism and widening of the economic base of small towns as strategies for viability. This led to a visit to the Scottsbluff Visitor Center to see how they handled visitors to the locality. A visit to the Wildcat Information Center also occurred for a similar reason. Both Centers had some student involvement in their operations and could serve as models for similar school involvement in the pilot project.

An invitation was extended from the Morrill Rotary Club where the SatC pilot project was described to members who attended. This Rotary Club maintained close links with Morrill schools, with the Superintendent giving a regular briefing on school activities, achievements and shortcomings. Other members suggested opportunities for the school and volunteered to help with concerns that were raised.

This interaction between the school and community service organisations was also evident at Potter where a meeting was held with a business group called the Potter Community Improvement. The role of the school and its links to the community were a very important part of the deliberations of PCI. Again, the level of volunteered help for specific projects was high.

At both Arthur and Tryon, meetings were held with the manager/operators of the businesses that students had started.

In the case of Arthur, it was with the grocery store manager. She was asked about the viability of the store and the role that students played as directors and her reaction to young people being her employers. She was extremely supportive of the project, was comfortable with the directorships as there were also adults of the Board to assist with protocols. While discussing these matters with the manager, students arrived to unload the truck that had just brought the week's restocking order and were disappointed that we had already volunteered and completed the unloading. The relationship between students and the store-keeper obviously functioned well at several levels. We also found the store had already spawned another business - a video rental business based mainly on videos donated from local people.

At Tryon, the meeting was with the manager of the Credit Union. This business is a stand alone organisation - that is, it is not a branch of a larger organisation - and while it has students on the Board of Management, financial rules mean they have to act as 'shadows' of adults, that is, be over 18. Chuck, our host in western Nebraska, is an ex banker, and is invaluable for the assistance and direction he gives in developing the Credit Union. Deposits stood at $900 000 when we were there and there is every indication the venture will succeed. There is also insurance underwriting available for such ventures in the U.S. which tends to make the initiative highly unlikely to fail.

In this regard, we also visited the site for a similar Credit Union planned for Morrill. In this case, School at the Center was investigating being the initiating organisation rather than schools being directly involved as an organisation. Students, however, would still have a role to play.

At Ord, a meeting with community and school Board members was hosted by the chair of the School Board. Discussion centred around how schools and their community can work together.

In Albion, the role of an environmental group - the Prairie Plains Foundation - and the place of bequests and community groups to assist with their management was the main focus of discussion. Again, at a meal hosted by members of the community, the close links between school and community were evident. So also was the professional role that schools could take, not only in education, but in carrying out research - in this case environmental research - that was of value to, and could be used by, others outside the immediate school community.

That the contribution can work in the other direction - an organisation can make a significant contribution to schools in the larger picture - was demonstrated by the visit to the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill in north eastern Nebraska.

The Center for Rural Affairs wrote the original supporting documents that were part of the impetus for the founding of School at the Center, along with the work of Paul Olsen and others at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. At the time of our visit, work was underway in preparing a challenge to the State legislature in Nebraska alleging funding discrimination against small and rural schools in the state. The documentation we read appeared to make a very strong case.

In Australia, anti-discrimination actions are generally related to gender or ethnicity, and to a lesser extent age and religious grounds. It appears this is also the norm in the U.S. A case mounted on rurality, if successful, could open a whole new area. It is interesting that Australian legislation does include discrimination with regard to 'place' as grounds for action.

A meeting was also held with the Five Rivers Resource Conservation Development District near Tecumseh. This organisation had been active in getting recognition for students for their community work although the Director was somewhat critical of some schools who demonstrated a shallow commitment to community contributions and failed to continue with this work once outside support funding was reduced.

The message was that schools need to write the process into their curriculum to build some form of longevity into the initiatives.

Lastly, a meeting was held with faculty from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Twenty faculty and other interested people attended including two administrators from schools we had not visited. The approach to the School at the Centre pilot project in Australia was described and those present were asked to give their thoughts on what was planned.

Strong support was forthcoming from those who attended for the Australian trial in general, and for the shift in emphasis planned for the Australian iteration. This shift in emphasis was in response to the difference in sense of community we had already identified in earlier planning and which was emphasised by the U.S. visit.

The shift was to raise the importance of making a conscious effort in the SatC implementation in Australia for the pilot schools to make a contribution to community without expecting, in the first instance, any return commitment from community. It was felt that reciprocity would build as a later outcome, rather than running the risk of a cynical response from some community members who might interpret 'community partnership' as advocated by School at the Center as being yet another way of a school demanding donations of time and effort solely for school purposes.

Other issues discussed at the meeting included academic linkages, the possibility of international teacher exchange based on teachers involved in SatC programs, and mentoring of the SatC project in Australia.

3.1.6 Overall Level of support for the School at the Centre Pilot Project

The level of support for the Australian trial of the School at the Center program can be judged not only from the interest and expressions of support and offers of assistance that were forthcoming everywhere we travelled in Nebraska, but also from the financial support that was given to making sure the two Australian visitors were able to make best use of the available time in Nebraska.

When time that was volunteered for meetings, forgone hire charges for vehicles and fuel, and accommodation and meal charges that were met by hosts including the University of Nebraska at Lincoln (who covered most accommodation charges in the second week of the visit) were tallied, the School at the Centre Pilot Project benefited to the tune of some AUD$7700 in expenses saved or contributed.

If the amount of support from third parties in Australia is added to this - notably support from Education Queensland to meet David Prete's salary and from PCAP for a number of other expenses to the value of over $6000 - a total of near AUD$14 000 of equivalent assistance for the project has been demonstrated up to this point in time.

This compares to the total funding granted by the Department of Transport and Regional Services of an amount of $49 000 from which GST has to be subtracted.

3.2 The Return Visit - the Director of School at the Center in Australia

3.2.1 Recontacting Australian schools

After the Nebraskan visit was completed, final plans were put in place for the return visit to Australia by the Director of the School at the Center progam.

All schools that had been identified as potential volunteers for the pilot project were re-contacted and the schedule of visits confirmed (APPENDIX 10). At the same time, the Australian project director was asked to present information about the School at the Centre Pilot Project at the annual Queensland Positive Rural Futures conference.

3.2.2 The Positive Rural Futures Conference

A paper and presentation was prepared (APPENDIX 11) and delivered at the PRF conference and a deal of interest raised. Media interviews were conducted with the local newspaper, with *Queensland Country Life* newspaper and with ABC Radio National and these became an important part of raising national awareness of the SatC Pilot Project.

The organisers of the PRF conference also extended an invitation to follow up the project at the 2002 conference. A Deputy Director General of Education Queensland

whose portfolio of responsibilities included rural education policy development endorsed this invitation.

Also attending the conference was a representative from the Department of Transport and Regional Services from Canberra. This gave the opportunity to publicly acknowledge the role of that Department in providing the funding for the School at the Centre Pilot Project.

The conference ended the day before the director of the Nebraskan School at the Center program arrived in Australia and this necessitated an overnight trip from the conference venue in Sarina to the Cairns airport. To assist with making this link, Northern PCAP made arrangements for a vehicle to be available - this vehicle was also subsequently used for several of the school visits made during the time that the Nebraskan director was in Australia. This assistance with travel was another demonstration of the level of support that the SatC project continues to receive in North Queensland.

Jerry Hoffman, the director of the School at the Center program in Nebraska was duly met on Sunday 13th May 2001.

Coincidently, the keynote speaker from the Positive Rural Futures Conference (Tim Walters from the Aspen Institute in the U.S.) arrived at the airport on another flight and the time was opportune to make introductions and an invitation to lunch together. That time was well spent making connections that could be of importance for School at the Center both in Nebraska and in Australia.

Early the following morning, the round of school visits began with Cooktown being first port of call.

At this point it is most appropriate that the ongoing support of the Northern Priority Area Program should be again acknowledged. It was not only the use of a vehicle that assisted with the three week itinerary of visits to schools, but also the personal support that the Coordinator of NPCAP gave by making contact with schools and facilitating, through the trusting relationship he had built with schools over a number of years, the acceptance of the SatC personnel at those schools.

3.2.3 Visits to schools: the Australian experience

School	Profile	Comment
Cooktown P-12	A P-12 school on a new campus. Total enrolment 470 being 242 primary and 188 secondary (60 in senior school). Approximately 30% of enrolment is indigenous.	Cooktown already has in place several initiatives that make the curriculum more relevant to local students. For example, there is a strong vocational education focus at the secondary department that arranges work placements for students together with tailored curriculum support, an initiative that was used as a case study on local leadership by research coming out of the University of Tasmania. (Both the Director of SatC, Nebraska and the Project Director of SatC North Queensland are part of the reference panel for that research). Other developments included Marine Studies, Aboriginal Heritage, Small Business Creation, Tourism, and Environmental Conservation. Meetings held with staff and community representatives.

Rossville	Primary school with 25 students enrolled. Situated in tropical jungle.	Distinguished by the number of people from the community who were at the school on the day visited. Links to the local grocery store, possible art centre, oral histories and mining were identified during discussions
Lakeland Downs	Primary school with 18 students enrolled although while we were there one family with 3 children had just moved to another town. Situated in a small agricultural district with a very recent history of development.	Strong focus on academic knowledge and skills but conscious of the needs of local people. Lakeland is a very new community growing around farming. Lies at the junction of the Cooktown and Cape roads. Initially the possibility of a link to local mining was discussed. However, more recently, the farming link is being developed with studies in local crops, cattle and feral animals being scheduled later in 2001.
Julatten	Primary school with 107 children enrolled. Includes a pre-school facility.	School is already involved in extending community services with the planned building of a children's centre. A news sheet is also run from the school acting both as a school newsletter and a vehicle for community notices and news.
Mt Molloy	Primary school with 44 students enrolled. Also includes a pre-school.	Has a wide catchment of students - e.g. Mt Carbine. Bower bird nest and bower in the school yard. Strong focus of birdwatching. Also interest in preparing brochures on the same topic.
Irvinebank	A one teacher school of 11 students.	Reference to the school web site shows the wide range of community links already in place from the town newspaper, to folk music, to vegetable production, to local history and the town festival. Outstanding example of school-community links along the SatC direction already in existence
Herberton	A P-10 school on two campuses. Has 29 children at pre-school, 195 at primary school, and 98 at secondary (8-10) although secondary numbers were falling.	Deputy Principal was on trip to school at the Center, Nebraska. Support from school administration. Teachers wanting to gain more information. Already had in place a community partnership that funded a student counsellor.
Alliance of Charters Towers Schools	The Alliance is a partnership formed by state schools in Charters Towers township (population ~10000) to promote state school enrolments, to showcase student work to the local community, and to offer planned and integrated professional development to educators.	Meeting with a number of principals and senior staff from several Alliance schools. The Alliance runs a shopfront office in the main street of Charters Towers with student work on display. Also provides professional development to teachers. Links together information flow to a number of schools. Possible SatC link to their Futures Committee.
Blackheath-Thornburgh	Private boarding school. There are 93 primary students and 275 secondary students (~100 in senior school). A significant part of the enrolment comprises boarders coming from grazing properties and remote settlements.	General interest shown by the principal. The school maintains strong community links with regular visits to communities from which students are sourced.

Ravenswood	Primary school with an enrolment of 26 children.	School was beginning to look at closer links with the community. Quilting was one activity that held promise for such a link and the possibility of the school's designing and managing a web site for the town (Ravenswood is steeped in mining history) was also under consideration.
Mingela	Primary school with 13 students.	Most students came from farming properties, often based on cattle. The link to the Mingela rodeo was an obvious possibility.
Collinsville schools (Collinsville High School, Primary School, Scottsville and St John Bosco.)	Collinsville primary has 170 students, Collinsville High has 126, and Scottville 26. These three state schools are building a partnership to move towards a Middle School structure. St John Bosco has 90 primary enrolments. It is a Catholic Education school situated right in the main street of Collinsville.	Collinsville is a coal mining town with a history of ups and downs of mining and power generation. The community had taken part in a Future Search activity in 1994/1995 but with few outcomes. Meeting with school principals and community members canvassed the possibility of reviving some of the Future Search issues. These could give a number of places to start e.g. local art, tourism maps and brochures, town beautification, town history especially Trade Union links. Many local families have been at Collinsville or Scottville from the very start - good source of oral history.
Babinda	This is a P-12 school with148 primary enrolments and 169 secondary students.	Has already formed a town taskforce following a Peter Kenyon visit. School and taskforce links very real possibility. Local history- sugar. Eco-tourism e.g. Boulders. Tropical architecture. Opportunity of museum display at railway station (tilt train). Later discussions centred on restoration of farming machinery.

3.2.4 Number of meetings

A log of the number of meetings conducted over the three-week period was kept. In summary, it revealed a very intense schedule and a wide range of potential supporters and stakeholders contacted:

Workshops = 6

Principal's meetings = 23

Meetings with individual staff members other than at workshops = not counted - numerous

Meetings involving Community = 13

Student meetings = 4 (generally meetings with students occurred as a part of other meetings)

Meetings involving senior educationists other than school based = 7

Meetings with university faculty (James Cook University of North Queensland) = 3.

Meeting with major parent body (Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations) = 1

Media coverage = 5 (Newspapers =Qld Country Life, Cairns Post). Radio = ABC Bush Telegraph (National), ABC Regional Townsville, ABC Regional Cairns).

3.2.5 *Contacts*

The list of personal contacts made was similarly extensive and includes the following (Unfortunately this is not a full list as some names were lost in the intensity of the discussions that took place).

Name	Detail
Frank Sims	NPCAP coordinator
Col Sutcliffe	Assistant Director General EQ
Geoff Lacey	EQ
Richard Nichols	Department of Transport and Regional Services Canberra
Jim Walters	Aspen Institute
Wendy Kirby	EQ. Conference organisation and Ed Views publication
Ross Woodger	Townsville and West EQ (Acting ADG at the time)
Alen Butler	Mackay District Director EQ (by phone)
Janine Buchholz	EQ Mackay District
Barry Staib	Cairns and Cape DD
David Curran	Tablelands-Johnstone DD
Rod Morris	EQ Tablelands-Johnstone
Catherine Hirsch	Education Adviser, Cairns and Cape District, EQ
Doug Quadrio	Principal, Cooktown State School (plus staff members)
Nellie Harvey	Parent/community (plus other community members)
Robyn Maxwell	Community/trainer
Leanne Mash	CEO Cooktown Shire Council
Anet Ridley	Principal Rossville State School (plus parents)
Geoffrey Higham	Principal Lakeland State School (plus school children)
Gayle Moleneaux	Parent at Lakeland
Sue Ahlers	Parent at Lakeland
Jenny Tuite	Principal at Julatten
Kay Erlandson	Parent of Julatten
Vicki Cherry	Parent at Mt Molloy
Mal Mackney	Principlal to Mt Molloy (plus staff)
Mark Aitken	Principal Herberton State School (plus primary and secondary staff)
David Prete	Deputy principal Herberton State School and SatC member
Debbie Fields	Principal Irvinebank State School (and many parents and students)
Judi Bain	President, QCPCA North Queensland (plus over 50 parents from across North Queensland at the QCPCA conference).
Rosemary Iloste	Community Participation Officer EQ
Kevan Goodworth	Assistant Director General EQ and Chair State PCAP
Ian Keane	CEO Tourism Tropical North Queensland
Mary Lyle	Mayor, Eacham Shire Council
Anne Portess	Mayor, Herberton Shire Council (plus all Councillors and CEO)
Gerry Collins	Chair Tablelands Promotion Bureau.
Sandra Bowtell	Manager, Alliance of Charters Towers State Schools
Michael O'Leary	Principal of an Alliance school
Derek Brady	Deputy Principal, School of Distance Ed. Charters Towers
John Clark	Principal, School of Distance Education and Chair NPCAP.
Ghiz Gallo	Director, Printworks.
Lou Rios	Manager Tablelands Promotion Bureau
Monique Pepper	Principal Ravenswood State School
Annette Parkinson	Head of Faculty, School of Education James Cook University
David McSwan	Director, Rural Education Research and Development Centre (JCU)
Leigh Robinson	Principal Collinsville State High (plus staff)
Ross Gillespie	Principal, Collinsville State School
Debbie Webster	Principal Scottville State School (plus parents)
Judy Hawkins	Acting Principal St John Bosco's Catholic School (plus staff)
Pat Malcolm	St John Bosco teacher and community improvement group

Barry Sheerer	Ambulance officer and community improvement group, Collinsville
Marissa Kerney	Post mistress and community improvement group , Collinsville
Ian Borthwick	Collinsville Power and community improvement group, Collinsville
Rachael Bollinger	Principal Mingela State School
Marie Radford	CEO Catholic Education North Queensland.
Rob Gilbert	Faculty of Education James Cook University
Ian Putt	Faculty of Education James Cook University
Marilyn Friend	Reporter, Queensland Country Life Newspaper
John King	Faculty of Education James Cook University
Kathy Maloney	Faculty of Education James Cook University
Jeff Coombes	Faculty of Education James Cook University
Ron Store	Faculty of Education James Cook University
Steve Ritchie	Faculty of Education James Cook University
Barbara Fowler	Principal Maleny State High School (phone)
Elizabeth Berger	Principal Babinda P-12 School
Ken Maclean	Acting DP Babinda P-12 (plus students)
Full staff meeting	Babinda P-12 School
Paul Campbell	Principal, Woree Sate High School (phone)
Colin Allen-Waters	Principal, Atherton State High School

3.2.6 What did we find?

3.2.6.1 Similarities

There are a lot of similarities between rural America and rural Australia. Amongst a raft of similarities, both show rural declines, both have communities under threat, both have educational programs that discount rural place in the curriculum.

At the same time, there is similar work to reassert value of rural place being done in Northern PCAP schools to what we saw in the schools we visited in the Great Plains, although, in Nebraska, it had been moved up to a higher level.

Example after example confirmed that meaningful activities that stem from locality can be bedded into the curriculum.

And there was also the confirmation that, when a school contributes to its community, the community will reciprocate - and both profit.

3.2.6.2 Differences

The places we visited in Nebraska had a greater sense of community and self-reliance - more self-determining. They did not wait for others to do something.

Second, Australian schools do not have similar access to private philanthropic money. They are a more centralised, state driven system. This makes them reliant on government funds and, constrained to conform to public policy priorities of the time. It remains to be seen what relationship can be formed with an external organisation (SatC is 'outside the system') advocating change that may not necessarily align well with existing policy or practice, although, at present, goodwill prevails.

Third, students appeared more interested in learning at the schools we visited in the U.S. The comparison was marked on our return to Australia where, in a number of schools, we found Australian students far less engaged. The world appeared to rest on their shoulders.

3.2.6.3 Transferability

Do we feel *School at the Center* U.S. transferable to *School at the Centre* N.Q.?

In a word, YES.

The similarities are so great and with the groundwork already begun, it would be surprising if the pilot project failed - despite the qualifications that have been identified.

However, there is one other large caveat.

People wanting a quick fix, and immediate implementation, need to realise that SatC takes time - but is in there for the long haul.

3.2.7 Contributions

The chapter on the American visit concluded with an estimate of the financial contributions made to the SatC Pilot Project up to that point in time (refer section 3.1.6).

It would be only fitting that the contributions made at the Australian end should also be acknowledged up to the time of writing of this report.

A tally has been kept of the time willingly given by school staff, school leadership and community people to listen to SatC presentations and join in discussions on possibilities of SatC implementation at individual schools. In addition, costs met by others in relation to transport, accommodation and expenses such as printing of material have been recorded.

In all, up to late August 2001, a total of $9100 of contributions in kind have been made to the SatC project during the Australian part of Phase 1.

This gives a total of contributions to date of more than $23 000 which compares to the original funding of $49 500 from the federal government.

That a range of people and organisations should contribute so much towards the trial of School at the Centre in Australia is indicative of the depth of demand for attention to be paid to rural people and rural places.

Chapter 4.

An American Perspective: *On! On!*

4.1 Philosophical Notes from the Director, School at the Center

During the time of the Australian school visits, the Director of School at the Center, Nebraska, kept diary notes on visits as they occurred and later reflected on the experiences. These reflections form a valuable, independent overview of the situation up to the end of Phase 1 of the Pilot Project.

4.1.1 Opening remarks

The title of this report *On! On!* comes from my first cultural encounter in Cooktown, North Queensland. It was during an evening walk through the Botanical Gardens on 14th May, 2001 when we happened upon a local group of Hash House Harriers crying *On! On!* I understand this is a worldwide club with local chapters and that Australia boasts the largest membership in the Harrier's InterHASH organization. Their motto is *'The Harriers: a drinking club with a running problem'*. But, is it appropriate for an American to point out this type of activity in a report aimed at federal, state, regional and local officials? Yes it is, and here is why.

The Harriers have no rules but a set of values that guide each participant's behavior:

> *(1) It is not a race, but a run. You cannot win and you cannot lose.*
> *(2) You can cheat but it is best not to get caught.*
> *(3) Do not wear anything either too new or too coordinated. Be yourself.*

On! On! is shouted to alert other runners near and far that someone is on the trail again. It is to make sure that everyone participates, and everyone finishes to enjoy communal fellowship. I believe this speaks to a traditional rural cultural belief system based on a sense of self-reliance rather than dependence, of social egalitarianism as opposed to competition, and of self-governance instead of authoritarianism. In short, this club demonstrates that social group belonging and cohesiveness is based on trusting relationships. These beliefs form in the human expression of the Hash House Harriers, in the sugarcane uprising of the Melanesian workers in the early 1900s, and in the present-day work of the Tablelands Promotion Bureau, to cite a few examples.

In Alan Frost's book entitled *East Coast Country: A Northern Queensland Dreaming*, he accounts for his love of Far North Queensland. That love is based on the rich cultural traditions, communal beliefs, and a sense of place shared by people in North Queensland communities. But, it is a love that he has discovered in adulthood. Growing up, Frost states that he was not educated by family, by the community, and by formal schooling to appreciate his place. His *place*, North Queensland, was a cultural and economic vacuum compared to the cosmopolitan centers of Sydney, Brisbane, and Melbourne.

Frost tells a story that is not too dissimilar to my own personal experience and that of my parents and grandparents who grew up and out of the sugar beet fields and small, intimate social groupings of German-Russian, Mexican, Japanese immigrant families and First Nation families in Western Nebraska.

For example, Frost describes the Spanish influence in sugar cane farming and community building in Innisfail. Ray Jordana was born in Mataro in Catalonia, Spain, in 1909, and migrated to Australia in 1916. His family went first to Melbourne, where his father learned that sugar cane was being cultivated in Innisfail by families of Spanish and Italian descent. They moved to Innisfail in 1919.

Jordana, as with Frost, reflected on his identity later in life. He had revisited Spain many times in his life without ever doubting his Australian identity. Frost states on Jordana, *'He much preferred the openness of society here to the rigidities he experienced in Europe'.* That *openness* to which Jordana refers is still present in the Australian communities today. It was felt during my visits with Ivan Searston to schools and communities in North Queensland, extending from Cooktown in the North to Charters Towers and Collinsville in the South. Children and youth were open and welcoming of two strangers, one with a strange accent, and wanted to educate these visitors about the knowledge they have of their place: legends, history, flora and fauna, economics, word usage, weather patterns, snakes and spiders, and other children and families.

Much like small communities in the US, these values are in tension with the cosmopolitan values most identified in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra. In the United States it would be New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles. In Europe it would include London, Paris, and Munich.

Globalization, competition, and privatization are born out of social urbanization, causing a cultural and economic shift in the rural and remote regions of Queensland from self-reliance to external-determination or co-dependence. The frequent use of the pronoun *'they'* by various community residents and workers indicates that it is *'someone else's responsibility to sustain this town'.* Typically this 'someone else' is the government.

I experienced this tension in meetings with community leaders, parents, and school officials. Trust of each other is wearing thin. And it may prove to be the downfall in the sustainability of many rural and remote communities in North Queensland unless proper long-term action is taken. I believe this action centers in the school and the formal mechanisms of schooling (i.e., the construction and use of local knowledge in organising the curriculum, in teaching methods, in the involvement of community resources in schooling, and in the involvement of school resources in community development).

Evidence of a shift toward co-dependence and free-market competition is visible in rural and remote North Queensland. There is a drying up of public and private capital resources to develop advanced telecommunications infrastructure, to establish local community banking for retention of investment capital, to support entrepreneurship and small business creation as a method for poverty reduction, and to encourage construction of affordable housing. Queensland exhibits a three-tiered economy: the middle and upper class growing out of the cosmopolitan centers (e.g., Brisbane), a solid middle class in the trade centers (e.g., Townsville and Cairns), and an emerging

lower class living in the rural and remote regions (e.g., Herberton Shire, Arukun Shire).

This economic situation contributes to the *youthful misapprehensions* of present-day Far North and Northern Queenslanders. In terms of the thousands of children and youth in North Queensland, this situation firmly embeds in their formal school experience and the experience of life in their community as a *pedagogy of hopelessness*.

The question that looms large for educators, community developers, shire councils, regional and state government officials, and private industry, comes from Alan Frost's interview with Ray Jordana:

In seeing education as a principal tool by which to live, Ray Jordana identified one of the most powerful influences in Australian society. For countless thousands of people, rather than inherited wealth or privilege, it has been education that has underlain social mobility.

Queensland educators and non-educators must view education as a tool for self-improvement, a tool or method to re-inculcate self-determination and responsibility, and the rediscovery of trust that is essential to the cultural, economic, civic, and environmental sustainability of a given place and region.

4.1.2 *Relevant Connections: Education and the Building of Social-Economic Capital*

The Research and Development Programs for Rural and Regional Australia were established by the Australian federal government to *improve the availability and application of research and data on rural social and economic issues, to foster community development activities and to enhance community understanding of development techniques and processes.* A situation report for Far North Queensland was prepared based on a series of studies, plans and strategies prepared to develop the regional growth management plan in 1993. The Far North Queensland Regional Economic Development Strategy (FNQREDS) was completed in 1997 and released as the FNQ 2010 Plan. The aim of the FNQREDS could serve as the building block for community asset development on which community-based education could be mounted for state schools to 'gift-back' to the local and regional communities.

The aim of the FNQREDS is to achieve a regional economy in FNQ that:

a. *will foster appropriate economic development and preserve the quality of life and the region's unique environment,*
b. *will enhance community lifestyle and well being, now and for future generations,*
c. *is viable, ecologically sustainable, diverse, dynamic and competitive,*
d. *is based on local, domestic and international markets, and*
e. *involves key industries, primary production, tourism and knowledge-based industry.*

This presents an opportunity to build a public-private partnership between education agencies, economic development organisations, private industry and small businesses, and local and regional government and planning programs. The aim of such a partnership is to assist in creating a *pedagogy of*

hope in the formal and informal schooling processes of children and youth living in the rural and remote regions of Far North and North Queensland. This can be achieved by allowing for the local school curricula to face the community and for the teaching methods to focus on problem-based learning. Each of the above five aims can serve as themes for the organisation of curricula or learning content areas.

That there is a legitimacy to pursue this role for education is made possible by Education Queensland's *New Basics* initiative.

2010 Queensland State Education is a forward-thinking document on the ways schooling must change in state schools to meet the ever-demanding realities of cultural diversity, global economic forces, and the need to build community-social capital. It is not just rhetoric, but has curriculum framework documents in the eight key learning areas: English, Health and Physical Education, Languages other than English, Mathematics, Science, Studies of Society and Environment, Technology, and The Arts. Further, rich learning tasks are associated with each of the key learning areas.

Examples of rich learning tasks related to schools making a contribution to their communities include the following taken from the Education Queensland web site:

> **YEAR 9 RICH TASK #2: IMPROVING WELLBEING IN THE COMMUNITY**
>
> Students will work with a local community to develop a plan for improving an aspect of the well being of that local community and then enact the plan. They will evaluate the level of success they experience in enacting their plan and, where necessary, recommend future actions.
>
> **YEAR 6 RICH TASK #5: ORAL HISTORIES AND DIVERSE AND CHANGING LIFESTYLES**
>
> Students will explore change in, and diversity of, twentieth century lifestyles, with particular reference to the nature of work, by recording oral histories from various members of their own community, including people in a variety of cultural groups. They will use the oral histories as the basis for a finessed electronic media presentation that portrays significant changes in work practices in the past and predicts how work practices might change in the foreseeable future.
>
> **YEAR 6 RICH TASK #6: DESIGN, MAKE AND DISPLAY A PRODUCT**
>
> Students will design, or improve the design of, a purposeful product, and make the product or a working model or prototype. As part of a public display promoting their product, they will flesh out a (restricted) marketing plan and explore the suitability of materials for mass manufacture.

The context for the development of these rich tasks, which are carried out through innovative pedagogy in the classroom, is befitting of the objectives of the Commonwealth Department of Transport & Regional Services. Here are

statements made in the EQ2010 document that are relevant to economic and cultural capacity building in local rural and remote communities and regional Queensland.

> *The principles of civic duty, cultural respect, social equity and productive diversity should inform the development of curriculum and be part of the purpose of schooling.*
>
> *There is a shift to employment in small and medium size enterprises and self-employment, increases in the proportion of professional and skilled jobs, a decrease in unskilled jobs and an increase in the level of qualifications and skills needed to gain employment.*
>
> *The process of work is also changing with a decrease in repetitive and routine work and increased workplace reliance on skills, adaptability and problem-solving skills.*
>
> *Because human and social capital develop within families and through wider networks, Queensland state schools should be re-conceptualised as part of that learning society and become embedded in communities local and global in new ways.*
>
> *Schools will be supported to develop as community assets that are centres for learning communities and community development in partnerships with parents, business, other government agencies and their communities.*

A central theme running throughout both agency policy objectives is the importance of information technology in new economic development opportunities, to connect rural and remote children and youth to educational opportunities, and to provide educational opportunities to children, youth, families, and workers to use information technology skills in the workplace and in the building of community/social capital.

On! On! is a way of telling fellow runners near and far that they have found the trail. Education Queensland and the Department of Transport & Regional Services have a common trail that is aimed at the building of economic, social, and environmental capital. The agenda outlined above, with potential resource partners, are the points along the trail that will help rural and remote communities in North Queensland achieve higher levels of well being.

4.1.3 *Potential resource partners*

Cross government collaboration in the North Queensland pilot of School at the Centre will require effective communication and team building (trust) at the following levels, and with the following persons.

(1) Education Queensland district offices: Barry Staib, Cairns and Cape; David Curran, Tablelands-Johnstone; Wayne Butler and Ross Woodger, Townsville; and Alan Butler, Mackay North

(2) Education Queensland Education Advisors on Outcomes-based Education and the New Basics Pilot, for example, Catherine Hirsch, Cairns and Cape

(3) James Cook University: David McSwan, Director of RERDC; Annette Patterson, Head of the School of Education

(4) The Queensland Council of Parents & Citizens Association: Garry Cislowski, State President; and Errol Neale, President of the Northern Regional Council

(5) The various Shire Councils in which the schools are situated.

(6) The Northern Priority Country Area Program: Frank Sims, Director

Also, there are education foundations in Australia that should be pursued to further this cross-agency collaboration. This collaboration should seek intellectual and fiscal resources to pursue the SatC common agenda:

(1) Information Technology Infrastructure for Education and Work Skills (Teledesic; Telstra; the Education Foundation; Foundation for Development Cooperation)

(2) Poverty Reduction through Entrepreneurship and Small Business Creation (Sidney Myer Foundation; the William Buckland Foundation; Commonwealth Foundation)

(3) Community-based Capital and Revolving Loan Funds (the Foundation for Development Cooperation; Ford Foundation)

(4) Cultural Asset Development (the Australian Foundation for Youth and the Humanities)

(5) Community/School Strategic Improvement Planning and Civic Engagement (Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal; Foundation for Development Cooperation; Commonwealth Foundation)

4.2 Impressions on School at the Centre Pilot Community-Schools

This final section is written based on a visitor's impression of where community-school development opportunities exist in the pilot sites. The strengths in each community and school will be drawn on, and a connection made to what might be the capacity building work of each site. The intention is to not make a subjective assessment of whether one place is better or worse than another. Each community and school has to be taken at their face value because of the diversity of circumstances at this point in time. It is important to move forward from where each place is presently situated given their individual expectations for growth and development.

4.2.1 Cooktown State School

Cooktown population is about 1,800. Cooktown State School is 400 P-12. The Aboriginal population is about 20 percent in the community and in the school. It is near the Aboriginal community of Hopevale. There is a movement to include Aboriginal languages, and local Aboriginal members as teachers of that language. This should be encouraged at both the local level and through Education Queensland. There is a key person on the staff whose husband is a tribal leader who manages his clan's tribal trust land.

Other key players from the community include the CEO of the Cook Shire Council; the Regional Business Advisor to the Cape York Peninsula Development Association; and a teachers assistant at Cooktown State School who is also a local business proprietor. The interest is aimed primarily at entrepreneurship and small business creation.

First, the people mentioned are keen to work with the school and students in small business creation. Cooktown is becoming a location for expanded economic development. It is situated along the ocean, and most recently land prices have risen from $300 per acre to $30,000 per acre. It is a paradise of a community with a quiet and serene harbour on which boats gently float upon the surface, sun tanning. The cockatiels sing to each other and, to those who pass by, appear to be without any worries or care. People choose to live here because of the lifestyle.

Second, there seems to be interest from several teachers whose subject matter includes marine studies, English, and library/media services.

Finally, it is important to have the EQ education adviser on outcome-based education, who was involved in the SatC visit, to maintain a connection with this pilot. This adviser is a brilliant teacher of place. Her experience in an Aboriginal village on Darnley Island makes her a natural advocate of School at the Centre. She strongly believes that to teach well you must start with what children know, and how that relates to the cultural value system of a place. That learning must have deep relevance and meaning in children's lives. Once made relevant, learning is connected to the immediacy of the local environmental, economic, and cultural conditions. For example, in studying eels, children learned about when they were harvested by the elders. The timing of harvest revolved around the understanding that eels contained less fat, and thus were healthier to consume. They went through an understanding of the role eel play in the cultural mythologies and legends, in addition to the ways in which eel are naturally preserved to last throughout most of the year.

4.2.2 Rossville State School

Rossville is an small ex-tin mining town. The population is less than 200, with 24 students in P-7. The principal is quite forward-looking, respects the parents and their value structure, and can envision ways of incorporating those values into the curriculum and into community projects.

The opportunities for SatC type activities in Rossville include: (1) engage in a community-school strategic plan, (2) incorporate local artisans and musicians in the classroom, and (3) involve the children in the opening of a local grocery store/community art center.

4.2.3. Lakeland State School

Lakeland is a community with about 150 residents, situated in the center of cattle grazing country. The state school has 18 students in grades P-7. The principal has considerable musical talents and a strong focus on academic performance.

Lakeland is a community that was formed in the 1960s with many of the founding families still in the area. This is a pivotal opportunity to engage in community-based education: (1) the children and families can develop a

cultural asset plan forming the basis of the town's historical records, (2) oral histories can be conducted on the town founders and published as a community record, and (3) a community strategic plan can begin to identify long-term economic diversification strategies around creating small businesses that add value to the existing farming and grazing economy.

4.2.4 Julatten State School

Julatten School is the center of the community, and located along mainstreet. It is a community with a mix of cattle properties, farming including exotic fruits, and pockets of alternative lifestyle. Julatten State School runs a community-circulated newsletter that offers an opportunity to more fully develop a newspaper publishing company operated and managed by youth and parents. There is also an opportunity to explore the use of distance-learning technologies.

4.2.5 Mt. Molloy State School

Mt. Molloy's interest is in area bird habitat and connecting to the tourist trade. Their idea is to develop a bird habitat on the school grounds that can be visited by tourists. The children and youth would create brochures describing the different birds and their where they live. If this moves forward, then a key will be to establish a relationship with an ornithologist from James Cook University or with the Mareeba Wetland.

4.2.6 Irvinebank State School

This is the school that best resembles community-based education as a way of enhancing learner outcomes and as a way of having the school gift back to the community. There is a seamless interaction between school and community, and the children work and play in an intellectually open environment. That learning environment is not without boundaries: those boundaries are co-determined by the children, their parents and the teacher-principal.

The opportunities that exist in Irvinebank are based on existing work: (1) developing a local vegetable supply, (2) conducting oral histories and folk music based on those histories with local musicians, and (3) explore developing websites for local and/or area businesses and government agencies.

4.2.7 Herberton State School

Herberton, and the surrounding area, is experiencing incredible economic disruption at the moment. The local area has one of the lowest weekly family earning rates in the state[♦]. Tin mines closed some time ago and more recent mine closures have again affected local people. There are very few local job opportunities. Many people live on social security.

There are two manual arts instructors with interest in restoring an old tin mine for tourism. They are keen to engage secondary students, through the curriculum, in this renovation work, and to connect that work to the Herberton Shire Council's goal of improving historical infrastructure for tourism.

♦ 1996 median weekly family income in Far North Queensland (excluding Cairns City and Cook Shire) was $556; in North Queensland (excluding Burdekin Shire, Townsville City, and Thuringowa City) it was $650; and for Queensland it was $688. The lowest income was in Herberton Shire (Far North Queensland) with $440, and the highest income was in Pine Rivers Shire near Brisbane with $866. See the Office of Economic and Statistical Research income report for November 1998

Two other opportunities are present in Herberton. Woodleigh College sits on the edge of town, and is a live-in residence for Aboriginal youth from the Far North. Idle time seems to exist after school and during the weekend. Cultural asset mapping regarding talents in art, music, dance, literature, poetry, and sports ought to be pursued that include the entire town of Herberton, and those living at Woodleigh College. This asset map can then point to cultural exchange and development activities in the town of Herberton. This can fit in with the existing curriculum in sociology and culture.

Finally, there is a progressive shire council. Both the Mayor and the deputy Mayor are keen to involve youth in community work. There is an opportunity to involve youth in Shire Council meetings, and the research work related to the Council's development agenda. For example, the Shire Council is discussing the waste management system. This is an opportunity to study science as it relates to waste management technologies. It would be a way of making science relevant to the town, and the students would become part of the policy-making process of the council.

4.2.8 Alliance of Charters Towers State Schools

Charters Towers is a beautiful town of about 10,000 people. It was founded in 1872 as a gold mining town. In fact, the town sits on a pile of gold. The architectural style of the buildings maintains the Queenslander form. However, because of its past gold riches, it was able to bring in Romanesque styles for the Stock Exchange and the Australian National Bank Building. Both sit prominently on Main Street with a sense of strength and pride. This is an obvious community-school development opportunity.

The state schools in the Charters Towers area have formed an association to promote their profile to the local community. The Alliance of Charters Towers State Schools (ACTSS) mantra is *Regenerating Communities Through State Schools*. This philosophy is inherent in the physical location of the ACTSS office on Main Street, and in the public display of student work in the shopfront windows of that office. Student work ranges from poetry, self-portrait, landscape portrait, and research on the settlement patterns of Queensland.

The ACTSS mantra is also found in its governance structure. The principals, teachers, and parents from each school sit on a governing task force. It steers the ACTSS. Then, five sub-committees are established, on which sits parents and teachers from each school. One of the sub-committees is responsible for professional development.

Pedagogically and philosophically ACTSS is keen to School at the Center. In many ways, the teachers and principals felt this was something they did to some extent. There is an esteemed reliance upon the opinion of the principal of the Charters Towers School of Distance Education. He was one of the creators of ACTSS model, and is an entrepreneurial educator. He is also Chair of the Northern PCAP Area Management Committee and is very familiar with SatC, and quite supportive of it.

ACTTS is a model that ought to be showcased in other areas. Further, they are doing School at the Centre curriculum and community development work already. I would propose using them as an existing 'lighthouse' community-

school partner, and seek to provide opportunities for persons in the other SatC pilot sites to visit Charters Towers.

4.2.9 Ravenswood State School

Ravenswood is a town of about 400. It is another gold mining town, discovered in the 1870s. A couple of mines remain active today, although not to the same extent as in Charters Towers. The gold mine that recently opened has a 10-year lifespan.

The principal at Ravenswood State School (P-7), which has 26 students, has the major teaching role at the school. A teacher is shared between Mingela and Ravenswood, which may indicate a small space of time available to do extensive School at the Centre work. Or it could mean better coordination of such work between Mingela and Ravenswood.

The principal identified two activities related to SatC: (1) a community-school website performed with the Ravenswood Restoration Committee, and (2) quilting.

4.2.10 Collinsville Schools

Collinsville has a population of 2,500. The State School system has 350 P-7 students at Collinsville State Primary School and the smaller Scottville State Primary School. There are 120 8-12 students at a separate High School. A school operated by the Roman Catholic system has 90 primary school children. It is a town dependent upon coal mining, and once boasted a population of 5,000. Some context on Collinsville is necessary to understand opportunities for SatC in these schools.

Collinsville, founded around 1920, is a town built from mining companies, and, later, power generation. Its population has gone through many boom-and-bust cycles depending upon the mining activity. There are a handful of families that have been in Collinsville for many generations. These families offer the continuity of 'community'.

The principal of Collinsville State High School arrived in January, 2001 and is developing a policy of working with the primary schools and the community rather than going it alone. An obvious link would be with the postmistress whose relations in Collinsville run two generations.

I see two opportunities in Scottville. One, the students can be involved in developing a research survey to determine if the shop will have higher sales volume by relocating to the Scottville Road, the main intersection. It presently sits two blocks off the road, and away from a central sporting area. Second, the school secretary who works in the main office, was born and raised in Scottville. Her grandfather was also born and raised in Collinsville. Here is an opportunity to conduct oral histories.

On the other hand, the graphic arts teacher at Collinsville High School has been in the community for just five months - I presume he graduated from teachers college in the last two years. He is keen to engage the students in understanding artwork in a social-economic context, rather than just have them paint-by-numbers. We talked about how the presence of mining can

become part of an art effort in the community. I also spoke to a teacher of social sciences, and found he has a keen interest in working with the Collinsville Development Bureau.

4.2.11 Mingela State Primary School

Mingela State Primary School has 10 students in years 1-7. Mingela community has fewer than 30 people. The town has a pub, hotel, and post office. Otherwise, cattle stations surround it.

The principal identified the local annual rodeo and store as potential curriculum work

4.2.12 Babinda State School

Babinda is around 2,000 residents, and located 45 minutes south of Cairns. The state school has 310 students in grades P-12. Babinda's economy is dependent upon sugar cane. The sugar processing plant greets the visitor upon entry to the community.

We met with the principal and her deputy at the time, the student council, the District Director of Education Queensland, and the administrative and teaching staff. It would be a good exercise to have the children and youth participate in a community-school planning process with teachers and the administration. This planning process would give them first-hand access to work on curriculum development, and have a voice in making decisions about how to learn particular subject material. *Foxfire's* core practice of classroom democracy would work well in this setting.

For example, last year, one teacher who has been teaching at Babinda for eight years introduced a historical study of Babinda by having each child write a report on the history of their street. This was part of the curriculum on constructing narrative. This teacher discovered that this small piece of work could be expanded to include other areas of study, such as social sciences. This could be pushed further by having the students identify their own learning goals, connect these goals with the New Basics framework, and relate the learning goals with the community improvement project.

4.3 A Concluding Note

While there is a large state driven education system in Queensland without the individuality of local school boards in the American sense, the system appears to be moving in the direction of encouraging more local flexibility in design of the learning experiences that form the teaching in schools. Support for School at the Center was also evident from personnel is senior positions in that system.

The situation in schools visited in North Queensland also appears to be very conducive for School at the Centre philosophy and practice to be incorporated into what the schools do and again, school administrators, teachers, parents and community members spoken with were very interested in and supportive of the School at the Center ideas.

It would seem that the Hash House Harrier's cry captures where the Pilot Project is at this point in time.

On! On!

Chapter 5.

Moving on to Phase Two - The Next Steps.

5.1 The Volunteer Schools

The Northern PCAP conference held on the 31st July and 1st August was used as the pivotal point to shift from Phase One to Phase Two of the Pilot Project.

However, as has been stated earlier in this report, there is a deal of overlap between the three phases of the pilot project depending on the situation in the individual volunteer schools and the progress of the project itself. Even at this date, some schools have already progressed to implementation (Phase 3) of some ideas.

During the Northern PCAP conference, three workshop presentations were made about the School at the Centre project to seventy-two representatives from forty-six small and rural schools in the NPCAP district in North Queensland. And at the final assembly at the conference, a representative from each of the schools that had confirmed being a volunteer school in the project was acknowledged to the assembled group, presented with a School at the Centre poster, and a group photograph taken.

The NPCAP schools in the photo were:

Lakeland State Primary School
Rossville State Primary School
Julatten State Primary School
Mt Molloy State Primary School
Herberton P-10 State School
Collinsville State Primary School
Scottville State Primary School
Collinsville State High School
St John Bosco Catholic Primary School

Three other NPCAP schools confirmed their involvement just after the presentation

Cooktown P-12 State School
Irvinebank State Primary School
Mingela State Primary School

and a fourth school, Babinda P-12 State School outside the NPCAP area had already confirmed involvement.

This made a total of thirteen schools taking part in the pilot project, three of which were combined primary and secondary schools, thus making the equivalent of sixteen schools as volunteers which accords with the original target of 'up to twenty schools' being involved the project. School profiles are available on the Education Queensland web site <www.education.qld.gov.au>.

All classes of schools identified in the initial proposal to the March meeting of the NPCAP Area were represented with one single exception, that of an independent school. This was not thought to be a serious limitation as an independent school had asked to be included in the information flowing from the progress of the pilot even though other priorities precluded an immediate involvement. The same arrangement has been made with other schools who have elected to maintain a watching brief for the 2001 school year.

5.2 Some Implications of Schools Being Able to Choose Level of Involvement

One of the opportunities given to schools was to elect the level of involvement with the School at the Centre Pilot Project that was felt to be most suitable for the individual school. Examples of different levels of involvement given to schools ranged from a single teacher being involved to a major whole school and community integrated planning effort followed by implementation of the revised curriculum devised from that activity. The only proviso was that, whatever the level of involvement, it should be fully endorsed by the school administration.

It was anticipated that schools would approach involvement with SatC in a pragmatic fashion and generally opt for an incremental approach rather than a major planning exercise - especially in the light of the 20% contextualisation guideline espoused by SatC.

Generally, this did prove to be the case. However, Queensland is in the process of changing its curriculum to an outcomes based approach and schools are faced with major revision of their curriculum offerings regardless of involvement with SatC. This has caused some volunteer schools to ask if SatC could be of assistance in that major revision.

As there was now a range of possible levels of involvement by volunteer schools, it became clear that this created a new variable that would have to be included into the discussion of transferability of the School at the Center program to an Australian context. Not only would a *range of school types* be part of the investigation as was originally designed in the Pilot Project, but this elective *variability of involvement* would also have to be included.

Initial work with the schools that became involved with SatC early on, indicated that a simple four level hierarchy of involvement could used to guide discussion of transferability of the program. The four levels have been given the terms

(i) tasks
(ii) topics
(iii) focus
(iv) integrated planning

to distinguish the levels of involvement at the individual schools.

Tasks indicate small areas of contextualisation usually in one Key Learning Area (KLA = 'subject') and generally developed by one teacher for one year level in the school.

Topics (could also be called *themes*) generally extend across KLAs and may involve one or more teachers, but generally are within a single year level. (In small schools with multi-age classes, both tasks and topics can extend across year levels with appropriate adjustment for ability of students).

Focus applies more to a common strand of attention to one issue in the school. This issue extends across year levels and subject areas and spins off in multiple tasks and topics that are examined by various year levels and subjects. An example could be *tourism.*

Integrated planning refers to a major approach to revision of the school curriculum.

This four level hierarchy also provides a simple taxonomy to define the contextualisation process, provides a common language for participants to speak about their work, acts as an indicator for the amount of long-term planning effort that has to be put into implementation, and provides a basis for reporting on the transferability of SatC in the pilot schools.

Thus, the Pilot Program can now be reported against two major variables. The first is by school characteristic (for example primary, secondary, large, small, composite classes, ethnic mix) as recognised in the original project design. The second is by level of implementation as discussed immediately above.

5.3 Some Immediate Actions at Schools

5.3.1 Herberton

At the time of compilation of this report (August, 2001) Herberton school has already planned and implemented two activities that could be classed as *tasks* with a third *topic* being developed.

One task revolved around a challenge to a social science class to identify a new business opportunity in tourism that could contribute to the economic base of a small town. Students could work in groups to develop the idea for the small community they chose - this ensured students from indigenous communities could be meaningfully involved - with a final task being to report findings to the Chair of the Tablelands Promotion Bureau, the peak tourism organisation on the Atherton Tablelands.

The second task grew out of a welding course. One student designed and constructed a metal sculpture, based on the area's mining history, for presentation to the town's newly opening visitor centre.

Both tasks illustrate SatC philosophy of contextualising curriculum to place, and making a contribution to local community.

The topic being developed is the school's ongoing involvement with the visitor centre both for construction of displays for the centre, showcasing of student school work in one area of the centre, assistance with restoration of antique mining equipment for later return to a heritage listed site, and the documentation of various historic aspects of the town and district.

5.3.2 Julatten

Julatten staff and parents are presently exploring the feasibility of a larger integrated planning exercise, and some supporting documentation is being prepared for the school. This documentation will be made available to all other SatC volunteer schools as it is produced.

5.3.3 Lakeland

Lakeland has already indicated intention to design three *topics* that link closely to the local farming community. Students will be introduced to crop studies, cattle husbandry, and later, feral animal control. These topics will be developed across KLAs and year levels (Lakeland school has a composite primary class).

5.3.4 Babinda

Babinda has identified a school *focus*- that of collecting, restoring and displaying farm machinery that is representative of past and present sugar farming practices. Not only will this link to the attention being paid to tourism as possible widening of the local economic base by the newly formed Community Taskforce, but will also allow the development of a range of sub tasks and topics within the school curriculum that revolve around that focus. These might range from collection and telling of family stories about the previous owners of the equipment, to studies into past agricultural practices and their effectiveness, to mechanical arts involved in restoration and operation of the equipment, and hospitality and customer handling skills at displays.

5.4 Interest from Elsewhere

In July, 2001, the Director of the Rural Education Research and Development Centre at James Cook University (and Principal Investigator of the SatC Pilot Project) was one of six parties invited to meet with senior personnel from the Federal Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) and the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MYCEETYA). The meeting exchanged information on rural educational initiatives across Australia and could contribute to moves to prepare a national rural and remote educational strategy for Australia.

In May the Principal Investigator, Dr McSwan was invited as keynote speaker to address in Townsville a gathering of all school principals (approximately 120) from the North Queensland area. The SatC philosophy prompted much discussion and favourable comments; the contextualisation of curriculum was seen to highly compatible with state-wide curriculum reform.

In addition, the project director of the School at the Centre Pilot Project was invited to address the rural school principals of South Australia at their annual conference in August. This presentation (APPENDIX 12) was well received and a suggestion concerning more effective use of vocational training expertise based on specialties that school could develop has been made to the association for their consideration. (See APPENDIX 13).

Also in August the Project Director and Mr Prete (who represented Education Queensland on the visit to Nebraska) presented an information paper to the NPCAP conference in Cairns. The text of this paper is included as APPENDIX 14.

5.5 Next Steps

The School at the Centre Pilot Project has generated significant interest in local schools in the Priority Country Area Program in North Queensland, in Education Queensland, in Catholic Education in North Queensland, and in a range of communities in the North. The SatC Pilot has also attracted attention from further afield - both in Australia (DETYA, MYCEETYA and interstate educational organisations as well as interest from public media) and in the United States (in particular, discussions are about to begin with the Ford Foundation and the World Bank).

This indicates the depth of interest that exists in our schools and in the communities in which they are situated both near and far, in creating space in the curriculum for rural lifestyles and rural values and the future viability of rural places as a legitimate area of study.

That interest is not restricted to rural people's interest in their own future. That rural has a future is an interest for most people, rural or not.

The School at the Centre Pilot Project, one of the philosophical and practical approaches to addressing the challenge to rural futures by working with schools and young people in rural places, is at the beginning of the second phase of the pilot project - that of working through a planning stage with individual schools to pursue contextualisation of the curriculum being used at those schools.

All indications so far point to the successful transference of the U.S. (Nebraskan) philosophy and practice to the volunteer pilot schools in Australia.

The planning phase will continue well into 2002, with schools implementing those plans at appropriate times. Indeed, some schools have already progressed to implementation of smaller tasks even at this point.

The next report on the School at the Centre Pilot Project will document and summarise the planning process.

Appendices

Things to Consider - SatC Implementation

1. Limit imposed by funding availability

The School at the Centre Pilot Project was conceived as a research based project to assess the transferability of the School at the Center program in Nebraska, U.S. to the Australian situation.

Two factors immediately impinged on initial planning.

The first was the amount of supporting funding that was available to conduct a sufficiently credible trial. The original submission to the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services was pared to the bone for the strategy envisioned - namely up to 20 participating schools from the Northern Priority Country Area Program region. However, the funding received was less than that asked for, so some revision of the planned pilot program was necessitated.

The second was the nature of the Nebraskan School at the Center program itself. In the U.S., the SatC program was primarily situated in smaller rural schools with a predominantly mid-west white clientele. Following on from this, while the original pilot program in North Queensland did contemplate involving schools with a wider size range and ethnic diversity, the lesser amount of funding has meant this aim has had to be reassessed. Compounding this, the majority of ethnically diverse schools in Northern PCAP are also generally more distant from regional centres and therefore more expensive to visit. Hence, in the revision of the pilot program budget and implementation plan, some hard decisions had to be made and validated to work within the new constraints.

2. Range of school sizes to be involved.

School sizes in the northern PCAP region range from tiny one teacher primary schools, to large primary schools, to combined primary and secondary schools, to stand-alone secondary schools, to Distance Education and boarding schools. Both State schools and Catholic education systems are also represented.

To gain the greatest scope for trialing the SatC program in North Queensland, it was felt that each of these schools should be represented where possible.
There fore the following list was prepared.

One teacher school	2
Smallish primary school	2
Large primary school	1*
Catholic Ed	2
SoDE	1
P-10 split campus	1
P-10 same campus	1
P-12	1**
8-12 secondary	1**
	12

5 4

However, this list posed a number of questions. Firstly, is a community of place necessary for SatC to function? That is, would SoDE be appropriate? Also, this raised the question of the inclusion of a boarding school e.g Herberton or Charters Towers schools.

Secondly, it was recognised that trialing SatC within the Year 11 and 12 area might be taking on too much especially as those years are generally guided by more strict curriculum requirements that might be asking too much of an initial SatC pilot.

Further, SatC in Nebraska is generally found in smaller communities. A larger school with its larger community may also be extending the pilot program too far considering the limited finances of the pilot project (see ** in list above).

With the help of Frank Sims of NPCAP, this list was checked against actual schools - assuming most would at least consider volunteering, and found to be quite practical even if only a percentage of the possible schools made the final decision to be involved.

3. Distance and cost factors

As the SatC pilot will be operated from an Atherton Tableland base, distance and cost were also reviewed. It became apparent that clustering potential volunteer schools would be possible if these were restricted to the Atherton Tablelands district (includes Tableland, Walsh and Georgetown LPCs), the Charters Towers district, and the Bowen district.

These clusters gave the best control over transport costs and could be reached by car comparatively easily. In fact, a high number of schools on the Tablelands would also decrease overnight accommodation costs.

4. Culturally different schools

By limiting the implementation area for the SatC pilot program to that described above, schools with greater 'rurality' and remoteness and therefore ones that were more costly to visit and support were obviously removed from consideration in the pilot program.

This decision also had the effect of removing most of the schools that had a wider range of cultures, and ones that were 'culturally different' from consideration in the pilot program.

However, taking into account that the SatC program in the U.S. has been, as has been previously mentioned, largely dealing with a majority white clientele in rural areas, the additional overlay of cultural variables could, at the level of funding assistance available, introduce too many complications to assess properly.

It was felt that a trial in a broadly similar situation to the original SatC milieu would see if the program could translate successfully under more similar conditions would be the best approach to take initially, and the unfortunate exclusion of culturally different schools resulting from the geographic cost constraint could be supported.

It should be noted that SatC in Nebraska is working with First Nation communities and this work will underpin further SatC trials in North Queensland. However, if it proves that SatC processes cannot translate effectively to Australian conditions in more optimum trial sites, further trials of SatC out here would be less likely.

Further, providing some of the potential schools in the selected clusters do volunteer, e.g. Herberton, thre will be some cognisance taken of culturally different students, especially Aboriginal and Islander students.

5. Community characteristics

During considerations of schools and their communities, a number of other questions were raised.
The query about the need for a community of place has already been mentioned in relation to SoDE and boarding schools.

However, this query can be extended to some one teacher schools which often service a 'district' rather than a community agglomeration - that is a dispersed population rather than one centred in close proximity. Is a critical mass necessary?

On a different tack, does the community have to have any particular characteristic? Is there a 'readiness' factor? Will the difference between U.S. and Australian traditions, for example barn-raising and rugged individualism, influence the translatability of SatC?

6. Other implementation issues

Several other issues have been identified. For example, James Cook University protocols demand written authority from participating schools. Other issues include ownership of materials produced during the progress of the SatC trial, and sign off of reports written about the SatC pilot. These have been addressed or are in the process of being addressed.

It should also go without saying that volunteer schools should have endorsement from their respective systems for their participation in the SatC pilot. In this regard, SatC itself will maintain contact with both Education Queensland and Catholic Education. Similarly, contact will be maintained with a number of other players who could also be of importance to the pilot.

However, an implementation issue that has arisen from the above considerations is a variation to the original parameters of the funding submission.

It seems entirely supportable in view of the clustering of schools for the pilot, that some variation to the original idea of running eight district workshops could create some funding savings.

Two workshops would still be run with James Cook undergraduate teachers. A third would introduce all Northern Area PCAP members to the program. However the final five could be covered by the individual visits to schools that were planned as part of the implementation stage. Both the clustering of schools proposed and the diversity of the schools would make this seem the best way to go.

Discussion would be welcome, especially on the highlighted points.

Over to you

Ivan Searston
Project Director
School at the Centre Pilot Project
North Queensland

X-From_: jh50022@alltel.net Fri Mar 16 15:11:36 2001
From: "Jerry L. Hoffman" <jh50022@alltel.net>
To: "'Ivan & Mary Searston'" <searston@tpg.com.au>
Subject: RE: implementation time
Date: Thu, 15 Mar 2001 22:14:53 -0600
X-MSMail-Priority: Normal
X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook CWS, Build 9.0.2416 (9.0.2910.0)
X-MimeOLE: Produced By Microsoft MimeOLE V5.00.2314.1300
Importance: Normal

Ivan

Thanks for the clarification!! Very helpful.

I particularly found valuable the white/First Nations distinction. SAC does work in primarily white rural communities. Most of these communities (24 out of 25) fall under the federal governments definition of "high" poverty areas, as measure by household income. And, half of the 25 are in the remote sections of Nebraska; that is, where the population density is six persons or less per square mile.

I am also glad that you made mention of our work in First Nation communities. My work with the Omaha Nation and, more recently, the Santee Nation requires a significant amount of financial resources and a different type of human resource. Further, it also requires a longer time frame, one not connected closely with the temporal notions of "Western culture."

I would also mention, too, that SAC is working with communities that have 50 percent or more Hispanic populations. These are individuals (students, families, and cultural leaders) whose cultural heritage is based in Latin and South American countries.

In spite of these efforts, our work reflects the realities of local places. And, these rural communities are primarily comprised of European descendants.

Is a community of place necessary for SatC to function? If, by this question, you mean having a school located in a community, then no. It can work in the setting of a boarding school, and other type of school organizations. The point here would be to take elements of the curriculum and create a community of place. For example, a teacher could take the history section of the social studies curriculum and engage students in oral and living histories or work in the area of "folklife". A science teacher may take a portion of the biology curriculum that studies plant and cell life and study the species covering the paddocks in the country, how many calories are contained in different types of grasses, and what grasses might be best for grazing livestock (in terms of caloric intake). Thus, it should work in both a community agglomeration and one that is more dispersed.

The community does not need to have any particular characteristic. You should be able to work with any given local characteristics. However, there is a "readiness" factor I use in working with communities and schools in the States. There must be interest and commitment expressed by at least one teacher, the school administrator and/or a school board member (since you don't have publicly elected school boards, the administrator should been keen to support this work), and a member or two from the "community". A parent or parents can serve as the "community" person, and should be involved in the planning, implementation and assessment phase of the work, when possible. When you have commitment from these three "sectors" (teacher, administrator, parent/community), then you have a higher chance of a successful project, and a higher probability that the "project" will move into other areas of the curriculum and involvement of other faculty.

I do not believe the differences of tradition should prove a barrier in the translation of SatC/US to SatC/Australia. My reason for saying this is that the work of community-based education (i.e., its pedagogy) emanates from local traditions. It should be translated across cultural traditions and community mores. A testament of this is our reliance upon the work of Paulo Freire in Brazil and Julius Nyerere of Tanzanzia. While the cultural and political context of their work in the 1960s and 1970s is different to our application of it (community-based education) in the US, the use of cultural traditions and economic characteristics of communities and/or regions as grist for student learning and for teaching is the element held in common.

The political ideology of my work in the States, however, may not be as easily translatable to Australia given the difference governance structures and activist politics. But, we are not much interested in this part of the work. The work that is of interest is the use of community-based pedagogy (the teaching and learning of subject-based content) as a "tool" for

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cultural and economic development of communities in rural and remote areas of Northern Queensland.

Is a trial in year 11 and 12 too much? That is for you to decide. Again, a teacher will need to see the creative opportunities given the strict curriculum requirements in their discipline. But, I have seen it work well in states like Kentucky and Tennessee, where the curriculum requirements are among the strictest in the US, and connected with "high-stakes" testing.

In this respect, you should have teachers from all grade levels, where possible, submit curricular ideas. See what holds the most promise in terms of having some measures of local success. I would ask someone from Education Queensland to serve as an advisor to ensure integrity of the curriculum, and that such proposals will meet necessary Queensland requirements. If Trish Collins is still the principal education officer (performance measurement) in Rockhampton, then I would ask for her involvement. She is in tune with this philosophy. I met her through Mark Weir.

I agree with your statement of making a trial based in nearly similar situations to the SatC milieu.

The workshop plan sounds fine.

I hope this is a useful contribution to the discussion.

Peace.

Jerry

-----Original Message-----
From: Ivan & Mary Searston [mailto:searston@tpg.com.au]
Sent: Friday, March 09, 2001 11:05 AM
To: jerry_lee_hoffman@email.msn.com
Subject: implementation time

<< File: Statement about Volunteer Schools.doc >> Whoa, Jerry. You have misread the timelines for SatC in North Queensland.
The pilot project is only covered for $40000 AUD (about $20000 of your money) so you can see it has to be a very small pilot program. After you come over in May/June and meet some school folks, they will make the final decision about being volunteer participants with SatC North Queensland. Rest of 2001 will be working with these schools to get ready for implementation in early 2002 (Our school year runs February to November). Reports for our funding body will have to be generated in late 2001 at the 'ready to implement' stage, and about half way through 2002 when sufficient results are available to create a meaningful assessment of the pilot program. That is, SatC North Queensland has a fairly short life.
However, as I feel the reports will be positive (and I am not pre-empting outcomes, I just feel it is a winner if done properly in line with SatC Nebraska philosophy with only some tweaking for Australian conditions), another funding application for more extensive work will be written at the same time. This would include working in more culturally diverse communities etc. That's when the work would really move to a larger scale.
I attach some of our thinking for the initial pilot trial.
Regards, Ivan

School at the Centre

An Introduction and Overview.

This presentation is intended to assist principals, teachers and school communities make a decision about volunteering for a place in the School at the Centre Pilot Project in 2001-2002.

Up to twelve schools may be involved.

School at the Centre

The School at the Centre vision suggests students study place to become stewards of their community's environment and culture; preservers of their community's history; and builders of their community's future.

School at the Centre - Key components

- **20% of curriculum should reflect place -** that is, the curriculum should be contextualised.
- **The school should actively contribute to the local community**

A framework of
our earth
our civil good
our community heritage
our economy
is used as a basis to assist with the contextualisation.

American origins

This pilot project grew out of the successful School at the Center program in Nebraska in the United States.

There, the School at the Center Program is one of several strategies, based in different agencies, being pursued by the State of Nebraska to strengthen local communities.

SatC, begun in 1990, is focused on the role of schools.

The program has demonstrated the critical role schools can have in contributing, through the learning process, to the vitality and viability of the rural communities in which they are an important and integral part.

Australian interest

Both Federal and State governments in Australia have shown interest in the initiatives being pursued in rural Nebraska.

Two key people from the School at the Center program, one being the Director of the initiative, were invited to Queensland for the Government sponsored Positive Rural Futures Conference in 1999.

Following that conference, the director of SatC spoke at a seminar at Ravenshoe in North Queensland organised by the Northern Priority Country Area Program.

This pilot proposal

Growing local interest resulted in a proposal being put to the Federal Government that a trial should be conducted in North Queensland to test the transferability of the program to Australian conditions.

This proposal originated in the Rural Education Research and Development Centre at James Cook University and was supported by the School at the Center in Nebraska. Several Northern Priority Country Area communities also lent support.

Approval of funding to begin a small-scale trial was notified in late 2000.

Why SatC?

- Already attracted government attention in Australia
- Links together several strands of thought about the future of rural communities.
- Sees schools as essential contributors to the vitality and viability of rural communities
- Underpinned by a strong focus on educational outcomes. It is not just a 'feel good' initiative.
- Proven track record

What School at the Centre is not:

SatC is not about creating a folk curriculum.

SatC fully appreciates the need for rural students to be capable in today's world and the need for generic skills - hence the 20% guide.

Secondly, SatC is not about compromising the educational outcomes mandated in any curriculum.

Contextualisation should focus on those areas where enhancement of outcomes could be expected. Another reason for the 20% guideline.

Thirdly, SatC is not about synthetic or simulated learning situations.

Rather, SatC focuses on the construction of learning situations associated with real life (local community) issues.

Part of the challenge and the joy of SatC is being able to effectively link reality, curriculum, pedagogy, and learning outcomes.

Fourthly, SatC is not about making the school into a community development agency.

What SatC does is encourage students and their school to identify roles where they can make a contribution to the community *as part of their learning.*

Some form of community development is often a welcome result.

School at the Centre -
and the new curriculum materials in Queensland

The parallels with the new curriculum in Queensland are numerous. Both SatC and the new curriculum are outcomes focused, both have a strong conceptual framework, both encourage authentic pedagogy, and both believe in 'real' assessments.

SatC has the additional attraction of offering a 'critical friend' to schools and teachers involved in translating the new curriculum materials into school work programs.

School at the Centre -
Links to the Educational Debate

Educators and reformers often worry that today's students spend too much of their time simply absorbing - and then reproducing - information transmitted to them... Students can earn credits, good grades and high test scores, they say, demonstrating a kind of mastery that frequently seems trivial, contrived or meaningless outside the school.

Newmann et al. 1995

The world in which children are growing up is not only the cosmopolitan world of national priorities, but the more immediate community needs. For primary age children especially, it is in the *local* context that they can have the opportunities to develop the competence to shape their lives and respond to the demands and expectations that are placed upon them.

Bell and Sigsworth 1987

... the implicit message sent through curriculum, school structure and location, and administrative protocols [is] that rural communities and their values, skills, and knowledge are backward and substandard, places and ideas to be left behind. Increasingly curriculum has been abstracted and generalised, directed more towards colleges and corporations...

PACERS 1994

In many rural communities, schools have become the vehicles for educating people to leave, fulfilling the prophecy that these places are doomed to poverty, decline, and despair.

Nachtigal 1998

Though most principals, superintendents, and teachers have a desire to do better and are working as hard as they can to provide a quality education to every student they serve, the road is rough and the going is slow.
The lead villain in this frustrating drama is the loss of community in our schools and in society itself.

Sergiovanni 1995

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In the absence of Social Capital, children are growing up without strong connections to adults and adult values and institutions. Aimless, normless, and increasingly violence-prone youth are the product.

Wehlage 1991

If we truly believe in 'lifelong learning', we, as teachers, must be doing a great disservice to our students if they are not given the chance to learn from and apply what they have learnt to situations outside classroom walls.

SATC, North Queensland 2001

Schools with strong professional communities were better able to offer authentic pedagogy and were more effective in promoting student achievement.

Newman and Wehlage, 1995

Authentic pedagogy [is] a way of thinking about and clearly identifying the key components of high quality teaching, learning and assessment. ...intended to support the development of students as 'active learners'.

Crowther et al, 1999

Authentic pedagogy has three essential elements:

construction of knowledge
disciplined inquiry
value beyond school.

Newman and Wehlage 1994

The venture clicked ... Students - previously bored, indifferent and disruptive - started doing research and writing assignments eagerly. They began to understand how the local knowledge and wisdom ... contributed to their lives, helped make sense of their world, and was valuable in its own right.

Hooley and Erkman, 1997

Authentic pedagogy shifts the instructional design more towards the teacher as facilitator and more towards techniques based on group work, active learning, problem based learning and student engagement and decision-making.

It needs professional support within the school and encourages contact with a wide range of people and materials from outside the classroom to contribute to its 'reality'.

SatC, North Queensland, 2001

Getting Involved

Register your interest - drop an email to satc@jcu.edu.au with some school details. You will then receive extra information and a visit from SatC staff to discuss the project further.

Your commitment:

Organise a get-together where your staff can meet and hear from the SatC staff.

Give your staff time to elect whether or not they will volunteer, and to what extent - whole school, just certain grades etc.

Agree to the SatC protocols - particularly important regarding intellectual property.

Make some staff time available for training and preparation.

Meet sundry costs for example duplication of materials for in-school use.

What SatC will provide:

Note: Because of the individualistic nature of the program in each pilot school, some variation to the following should be expected.

1. Introductory workshop and site visit.
2. Resource folder about SatC and similar initiatives.
3. Assistance with the implementation of the SatC program at your school. This includes site visits, help with contextualisation and with instructional design.
4. Continued professional support via direct contact with SatC staff.
5. Periodic site visits.
6. Assistance with program reflection and evaluation

More information?

http://satc.uni.edu - introduction to School at the Centre Download and read the *Our Own Earth* publications

http://albion.esu7.org/S@C/project/home.html - for projects within a SatC school

www.pacers.org - a similar organisation in another part of the U.S.

http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archives/completed/cors/Issues_in_Restructuring_Schools/ - Download and read Reports 2,4,5 and 8 to gain some insight into SatC educational validation

http://education.qld.gov.au/learning_ent/ldf/ideas - IDEAS is a larger pilot operating in Queensland. It has a similar educational validation but a wider focus of action

End

School at the Center

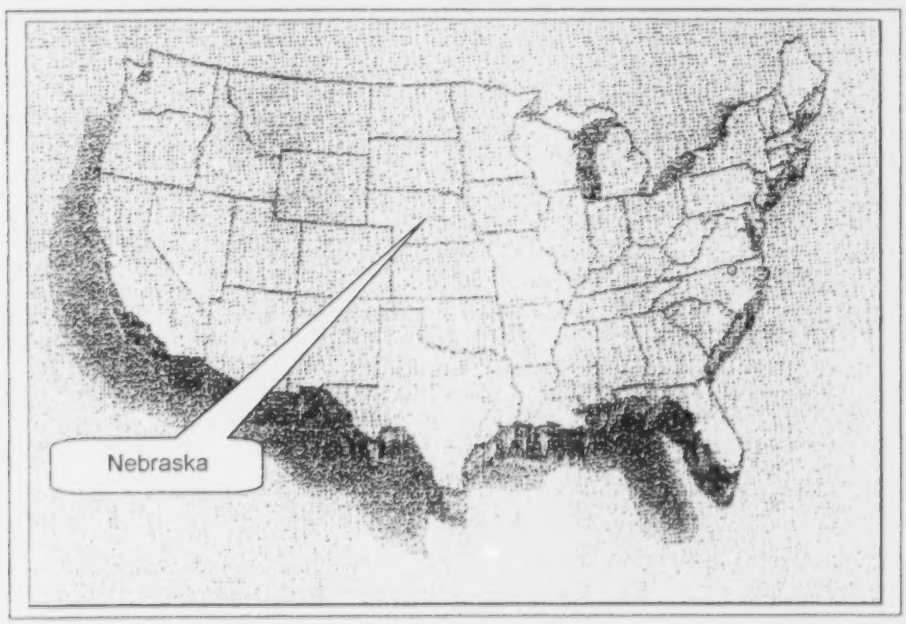
Nebraska.

Nebraska is one of the states in the Great Plains area of the United States. It is predominantly rural in nature with an agriculture-based economy. In the last few decades, Nebraska has faced many of the issues common to rural communities - decreasing farm workforce, declining small towns and population outflow.

Based in Walthill, Nebraska, the **Center for Rural Affairs** has a 25 year history of commitment to building communities that stand for social justice, economic opportunity, and environmental stewardship. Program focus includes sustainable agriculture, family farming, and rural development.

Ten years ago, the Center investigated possible roles that education and schools might have in addressing these rural problems.

Their report was entitled *A School at the Center: Community Based Education and Rural Redevelopment.* It became the underpinning document for the **School at the Center** program.



The **School at the Center** program now has a presence across much of Nebraska and into South Dakota. Overseas, interest has been shown by some New Zealand schools and both Federal and State governments in Australia have also become interested.

The **School at the Centre Pilot Program** in North Queensland is the result of local interest in the Nebraskan program following a visit to Australia of the Director of the **School at the Center**.

A School at the Center

Community-Based Education And Rural Redevelopment

Jim Walter, Paul Olson, Pat Rodgers, Linda Abboud, David Hansen, Erwin Goldenstein

This is publication No. 4 in the School at the Center series entitled From Our Own Earth
Miles Bryant, Editor

The report that follows was prepared by the Center for Rural Affairs' "Committee on Education." The committee was established by the Center in 1991 and charged to explore the educational meaning of the Center's various projects in agricultural communities. The members of the committee are Pat Rodgers, Randolph, Nebraska, school board member; Linda Abboud, West Point, Nebraska, teacher; David Hansen, Anselmo, Nebraska, farmer and pastor; Jim Walter, head of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Erwin Goldenstein, former rural administrator and present teacher educator at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln; and Paul Olson, Lincoln, Nebraska, formerly director of several Nebraska education reform projects and president of the board, Center for Rural Affairs.

The message of our report is that the schools in Nebraska often educate young people out of their rural communities. To stop this, we believe that the communities must become central to the schools. We propose how they can be so and describe how they have been so in a few cases. We also talk about how the community can become the center of the school in the areas of curriculum reform, school organization, planning, teacher and administrator education, and fiscal and tax policy. But if the community must be the center of the school in its study, the school must be at the center of the institutions of the community. The school often stands physically at the center of our communities. We believe that it can also be located there economically and culturally

Education in rural communities in Nebraska should educate young people *into* their communities rather than out of them. One of its highest goals should be the production *within* the local community of high achievement on the part of the student-soon-to-be-citizen. Perhaps 20 percent of the curriculum should be an exploration of Great Plains culture in music, the arts, literature, and the folk arts, local environmental and economic issues, local entrepreneurship, and local vocations. However, as later sections of this paper will make clear, our interest is not so much in the amount of time spent, as in the kind of work that students are asked to do. Nebraska's local schools do have the freedom to plan their own curricula and make them serve local needs. They can help recreate rural economic and cultural life.

I. The Problem

The old popular song used to ask, "How are you going to keep them down on the farm after they've seen Paree (Paris)?" The notion of the song was that cities with their sin and excitement and high culture were infinitely more exciting and desirable than farms and farm communities and that young people would never stay in the country after they had seen Paris (or Omaha, for that matter).

Nebraskans are still asking how farms and rural communities can retain their young leadership. Many communities have little time to protect themselves from becoming defunct.[1] Agricultural communities under 2,500 in the United States lost 8 percent of their population in the period 1980-90. Nebraska's rural counties lost 13 percent of their residents in the same period.[2] Now nearly 50 percent of the farmland in the country is operated by farmers likely to retire in the next 10 years. The number of farmers under age 25 has declined by 43 percent since 1982, and the few young-farmer programs that have been created do not insure a system of intergenerational transfer of land sufficient to protect small family farms.

The aging of the small town population in the state runs along parallel lines. A recent report from the University of Nebraska Bureau of Business Research shows Nebraska's towns under 500 lost 20,152 people between 1980 and 1990. Its towns and cities over 5,000 gained 65,450.[3] The report attributes the declines in small towns to changes in transportation patterns, but it also admits that the fragmentation of markets by large volume retail outlets has contributed to the process.[4] It further remarks that it "is unfortunate ... that local investors/entrepreneurs are not developing these

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markets" because local enterprise would circulate the earnings in the state. Local entrepreneurs would have a better chance of doing so if they were taught the skills of enterprise. Clearly the process of centralization can be stopped. As the cost of transportation and industrial farming goes up, the incentives for decentralized systems of farming and retailing will increase. What is required to stop the present trend is vision and will as well as good policy. And in the creation of vision and will, the schools play a role.[5]

The job is not impossible. The reasons that have made it difficult to keep people down on the farm or in rural communities after their exposure to cities may no longer pertain. America's cities are increasingly basket cases, many of them bankrupt or nearly so. Most have severe infrastructure problems, in housing, streets, traffic, police protection and pollution. More and more Americans are spending an hour or more per day traveling to get to work because of overcrowded throughways. The social divisions between the affluent suburbs and the inner cities continue to grow.[6]

Furthermore, a number of pilot projects suggest that, despite the odds, Nebraskans can reduce input and transportation costs and enable smaller family farms and microenterprises to survive. Labor intensive and diversified farming will return as herbicides and pesticides pollute our aquifers and as the costs of transporting food rise. Increasingly larger industries seeking to save money and wear and tear on their employees rely on computer communication with small town branches or independent corporations that perform a specialized function for them.

Some towns have also shown a robust capacity to build strong programs in architectural preservation, the arts, music, and history. Small towns need not be dead places culturally. Some of them have demonstrated that they are able to celebrate vigorously who they are and what they have stood for. Yet, whatever the employment or cultural situation, the young will not stay if school and family do not give them reasons to stay. We want them to give young people those reasons.

II. Double Mission of Rural Schools

One of the persons who reviewed this report in an earlier draft wrote to us as follows:

"First of all, I wish you had stressed a little more the fact that some kids' horizons are simply broader than the local community and that that's O.K. You're not trying to keep everyone at home. I kept wondering what our Physics professors son would have done if we had tried to keep him 'down on the farm'. . . . On the other hand, two of our six children have come home to live after living in Virginia and New York and much foreign travel. Our son is now back home and determined to engage in organic farming. But after graduating from high school, all six wanted to get away as soon as possible. It was an attitude of the community, and perhaps the school, that homebound youngsters were looked down on, even ridiculed. Fortunately, two of our six children came to realize that our town and our farm have something to offer, after all."

This story illustrate the dilemma that Nebraska schools face. They cannot prepare students just for the community because some may not choose to stay there. We cannot prepare students, just to leave the community or there will soon be no community. What can often be done is to use community issues and problems as paradigms of intellectual issues also at large in the national or world community.

We are well aware that a school's mission must be to address the many and various demands of its patrons. No matter how much improvement we might enjoy in our rural communities in future years, we realize that not all of the graduates of rural school systems will be able to remain in our locales.

In addition, even though we may dislike it, we know that our children will still be tested and judged academically, often on standards developed outside of our communities and on generic conceptions of what constitutes pertinent knowledge. These standards are developed on a regional or national basis by testing agencies, professional societies, and national panels set up to study educational risk and achievement in our country. Topics reflective of rural life are rarely employed in the construction of standard measures, and neither the professional societies in the humanities and social sciences nor such groups as those who wrote *A Nation at Risk* have focussed on the unique subject matter that might characterize the rural school. Because our children *may* leave the community and because they will be evaluated from outside the community, they must be able to

compete in a standardized academic atmosphere. Even those individuals who remain in our communities will be required to obtain additional education, often at the state and national levels. They will only be successful in those settings if our rural school systems have prepared them well for those environments. Because of these realities, we know that our school patrons demand that our students be competitive on standardized tests, both those given as part of our school programs and those required for higher education. Our patrons also carefully monitor our rural school systems' students' abilities to be competitive in obtaining scholarships and meeting entrance requirements in colleges and universities.

These demands create a heavy pressure on our rural school boards, administrators, and teachers to standardize their curricula, a practice that in the past met with success in many instances. However, we now see that these curricula have often failed to instill in our students an appreciation for their rural roots and way of life. We also know that these curricula have failed in preparing many of our students for a vocation that allows them to remain permanently in a rural community. This is not to say that the decline of rural communities in the last 50 years is to be attributed primarily to the schools. Obviously changes in transportation patterns, farm size, federal farm and tax policy, and expenditures for infrastructure and economic development have made it very difficult for young people to get jobs in their own communities. Yet, as we illustrate in this report, we believe that the disappearance of jobs in rural communities can be turned around and that the schools can help in this matter.

We acknowledge that our school systems must prepare our students for the larger communities around us, but we also believe that a curriculum void of any local subject matter is a disservice to our students and our rural communities. It is our belief that both of these goals can be accomplished by integrating the requirements of both missions in one comprehensive curriculum.

Our rural schools can successfully fulfill the dual mission of providing knowledge required by the total society and emphasizing and using knowledge relevant to our rural communities. Combining these missions is a great challenge and one that requires a delicate balance between the two objectives. But if it is successful, it will pay great dividends to our students and our communities.

III. The Quality of Rural Nebraska Schools as Community Builders

Were it not for the problem of outmigration and declining community, this booklet would be altogether untimely. In many ways Nebraska's schools are outstanding when compared with the schools of most other states, as recent statements from the United States Department of Education suggest. We may not stack up well in comparison with the schools of some other nations, especially in science and math, but we do well in comparison with our sister states. We have one of the highest rates of high school graduation in the nation.[7] Our students do better on the ACT (19.6) than those in any of the other fifty states save for one or two neighboring states such as Iowa (20.4).

Yet, despite this, a certain uneasiness with the system remains, and much of this focuses on rural education's role in rural communities. We know that we are losing many of our brightest and best.

The state has experienced a long history of legislation designed to close rural schools and consolidate rural districts into larger taxing units, a consolidation that has also meant the closing of attendance centers in small towns and rural areas. Rural areas have not prospered in consequence. No one would argue that all of those schools should have been kept alive, either schools of the one-room variety or of the eight-room small-town grade and high schools.

However, the closings have too often been mindless. The question in school closing has too often been, "Does this school have such and such equipment?" or "Does it offer such and such courses to make a rounded curriculum?" We recognize that state educational authorities in the State Department of Education have increasingly tried to move away from such criteria to more substantial performance criteria, but it has been hard to escape the history of negative response to rural education. While questions of equipment and curriculum may be somewhat relevant to quality, surely the more important questions are, "What kind of total education are the students getting? What kinds of people are emerging from the process? What is the effect of the education

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on the individual and the community?" The present efforts to reorganize rural schools will not, by themselves, solve the curricular problems described in this paper. On the other hand, reorganization by itself should not present the construction of the kinds of curricula we propose.

Another form of pressure to consolidate has recently appeared in the form of the "School Choice" law. This law permits students to enroll in districts other than their own if their parents apply to such districts and the district to which they apply approves. In 1991-92 3,118 students applied to enroll in districts other than their own, and 2,357 students received approval for such enrollment. While this committee does not either endorse or disapprove of the "School Choice" law, it recognizes that it is a fact of life. It seems likely that rural school districts that are not presenting imaginative programs to root the next generation in their regions may well lose their schools through attrition. Most of the applications came from the smaller districts of the state, and the larger portion of the students who applied gave curricular considerations as primary in their applications.

Curiously, the assessment of why schools fail or why they succeed is difficult. Professors Royce Ronning, Erwin Goldenstein and Jim Walter of the University of Nebraska found in their study of Nebraska rural education that few rural or small town schools had any information about their graduates -- what they were doing, how they felt that their education had served them, how the education that they had received served the local community.[8] Authorities at the higher level of state government do not have such information either.

Though Nebraska's effort in the last 40 years has been to close small schools (and it has been one of the most conservative states in this effort), it has not yet answered the question of what kinds of schools should emerge from this process and how they are expected to serve. In almost every study that has been made of the bigness/smallness issue, the evidence has come out on the side of keeping schools on a modest scale. One of the best of these studies is by Barker and Gump.[9] It shows that, whereas in the small school students may have fewer courses among which to choose, the very smallness of the school puts a great deal of pressure on students to assume responsibility for their education and self-development. They have to participate in music, art, athletics, and vocation-related activities such as FFA if the school is to have such activities. The student cannot hide behind the anonymity of the crowd.[10]

Thus, whereas the rural school may not be as rich in curriculum or educational materials, it may be richer in the relationships and sense of human responsibility that fosters education. It may also be a more "authentic" curriculum, as Grant Wiggins describes it. That is, it may more closely answer to the student's own life experiences and interests.[11]

To be richer, we feel that the rural school must be organized to take advantage of its strengths. One specialist in pedagogy with whom this committee consulted, a person who had visited many rural schools, observed that some of the rural schools that he had visited did not take advantage of the strengths of smallness. Teachers were giving lectures to groups of three to 10 students instead of entering into interactive discussions. Workbooks and worksheets were standard fare instead of the active writing, criticism, and rewriting that makes for a lively writing process (such a process has been promoted by the Nebraska Writing Project). In short, these rural schools were emulating the weak points that size necessarily forces on large schools. The result, as this critic saw it, was the very depersonalized and alienating education that small schools are best in a position to avoid. Fortunately, such practices are not characteristic of all rural schools and need not characterize any of them. If rural education is to be revitalized, the state will have to give attention to the unique sorts of pedagogy that can constitute the strength of the small school -- discussion groups, action research, community internships, and other methods described later in this study. Nebraska educational authorities from the Department of Education through the colleges of education and local superintendents and principals as well as teacher organizations will have to help one another to visualize what works best in the small school.

We believe that there are ways of organizing around smallness to make it a strength. We can push even further on the individual student's sense of initiative and responsibility for the community.[12] We can teach the student to find a useful and dignified role within the rural community while still in school. We can develop sound experiential education

related to community vocations, an education that is difficult to obtain in cities where distance and anonymity are barriers. Small towns and rural areas can prioritize what is done in the curriculum so that the student can emerge from it with essential skills without having multitudes of courses from which to choose. They can find ways to use specialized teachers in several districts so that a fairly diverse curriculum is possible without a huge staff. Of course, some changes in the present scheduling of classes around approximately one hour segments might be necessary to permit teachers who serve several districts to spend a half day to a day at each place.

Nebraska, with its excellent state television system, should also be able to find ways of using interactive technology to help the most remote schools. It is particularly important that the technology be employed in a way that allows the control of education to remain in the local community.

We know that new models of school and staff are required for the future rural school, but local ingenuity can create such models.

Teaching English or history or science may be a lonely business in the rural school. The emphasis on departmental or discipline-based teaching in the one-classroom or the eight/twelve-classroom school may need to be questioned in favor of the organization of interdisciplinary teams that can support one another's teaching in Humanities or Social Science or Science areas. Interaction with other teachers and with local people who read and think is important to any teacher -- to the teacher's maintaining the life of the mind.[13] To make this possible, some athletic conferences have also become academic conferences by holding common inservice training sessions within an area or discipline -- say History or English -- using the Educational Service Unit as the delivery system for inservice education. They treat the whole conference's cadre of teachers as if they were a single staff.

IV. Some Strengths of Small Communities and Small School Communities

Many rural people know that small town and rural culture should be something that the schools and community should be able to celebrate together. This celebration should come not just once a year on Booster Days or the occasional ethnic festival, useful as such events might be. Research tends to confirm this informal knowledge.

The Dutch psychotherapist, Jan Van den Berg, has summarized a series of studies as to what makes for a healthy human community. He argues that worldwide, four conditions have characterized healthy human communities: 1. The important social groupings are small; 2. Change is slow and continuity is sustained by customs, traditions and attitudes that give community life a sense of naturalness; 3. All aspects of life are closely integrated -- work and play, jobs and religion, life and death, youth and age -- so that nothing stands apart; and 4. Social belonging is automatic so that no one is left alone in growing up or grief or searching for a place.[14]

These advantages are also implicit in the rural school or can be made so. Students can work in important small groups. They can participate in dialogue about change and continuity in the community. They can, especially in community-based schools or "without walls" schools, integrate what they learn in school with work and play and with family and other community institutions.

One would not argue that many modern rural communities possess all of these healthy characteristics. Many have lost their economic center. TV has destroyed some of their sense of day-to-day, week-to-week community, on the block, in the neighborhood, or around the section. And this has happened not only in the city but in the hamlet and on the farm.

Still some of the old mechanisms of community concern are alive in many a small town -- oral history and gossip, branding days in the Sandhills, neighborhood concern for the sick and the needy, a capacity to get together and help out when a tornado has hit. There is some basis on which to build a local community-based education.

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V. Destructive Media Images of Rural Life

However, the small or rural community that Van den Berg sees as healthy is often presented as unattractive. That is partly what makes "Paris" look so good as the young person watches the media images. The chief media representations of rural communities come in Western movies and television programs, "Hee Haw" style sit-coms, and farm crisis films. The Westerns make rural life seem desolate and something to be ridden away from at the end of the big gun fight. The "Hee Haw" sit-coms make it seem hawkish and stupid. The farm crisis films sentimentalize rural community life as the struggle of good simple rural people against the evil local bankers, people who in real life were as put upon in many cases as were the farmers.

Nowhere is rural farm-based community life made to seem as glamorous as in "Dallas" or as sweet as in the Bob Newhart programs. Rarely is it presented as a life requiring intelligence and cunning and energy. Concomitantly, the visual media hardly touch on the problems of American cities aside from crime. The tradition of the American novel from Sinclair Lewis to Wright Morris tends to put down rural life. Though there is an alternative writing tradition now growing up -- one flourishing in Nebraska in the work of Ted Kooser, William Kloefkorn, Hilda Raz and others -- it is just beginning to reach the classroom. One could say similar things about other traditions of cultural expression in Nebraska -- music, painting, gardening and the like. One of the destructive effects of the negative presentation of rural life in the media and the limited attention given it in the curriculum has been that schools and towns have often turned to the local school's athletic team as the primary source of local pride or identity. While we believe in the educational ideal of a "strong mind in a strong body," we are confident that pride in community and school should extend beyond the team to confidence in good education, pride of culture, love of the history of the area and hope for its future. Once all of these factors are made important to the educational process, the athletic team will cease to be the only show in town and take its proper place as one among many significant sources of local distinction.

VI. Recent Research on Nebraska Rural Community and Rural Community Education

Professors James Walter, Ervin Goldenstein, and the late Royce Ronning recently completed some research regarding curriculum change in rural Nebraska high schools from 1953 to 1983.[15] Involved were 15 public and five Catholic schools chosen from all over rural Nebraska. The enrollments varied in size from fewer than 100 students to more than 1,500 students in grades 9 through 12. Transcripts were analyzed for a random sample of the graduates of each school in the years 1953, 1963, 1973, and 1983. The bulk of the curriculum for each of these years was devoted to English, social studies, math, business, and science. The percentage of the curriculum devoted to these subjects for the graduates studied, however, declined from almost 76 percent in 1953 to about 64 percent in 1983.

Courses more stereotypically associated with rural areas included agriculture which increased from .77 percent to 1.77 percent, home economics which increased from 2.24 percent to 3.41 percent and industrial arts which increased from 2.21 percent to 5.12 percent over the period in question. The percentage devoted to career education and cooperative education declined from about 6 percent to about 5 percent, while the percentage for health and physical education increased from slightly more than 2 percent to just over 6 percent. Art increased from 1.35 percent to 2.45 percent, music decreased from 7.7 percent to 6.44 percent, and foreign language remained virtually the same. Unfortunately, this research does not provide evidence of the content of the courses studied by graduates of the four years. Interviews with veteran teachers in the 20 schools, however, revealed little attention to the history, economy, resources, and problems of Nebraska or the Great Plains region in social studies courses, and little attention to Nebraska writers in English courses. Cather, Neihardt, and Sandoz were the Great Plains writers most frequently mentioned when interviewees were pressed for the names of writers who were actually studied.

Unfortunately, the Nebraska schools studied in this sample (which are probably typical) left no "paper trail" regarding the content and activities of the courses studied. They had only bits and pieces of information regarding their graduates since they had left high school. For schools to serve their communities and their students well, it seems

essential that such records be kept and studied. Only then can effective educational planning or planning for the communities' futures be done. Four long time residents and an equal number of veteran teachers in academic areas were interviewed in each school system surveyed by the researchers. Among those interviewed, there was a general agreement that the schools of 1983 offered a better curriculum than was offered in preceding decades. Usually their basis for such a judgment was the assertion that a wider range of subjects was being offered in 1983. This was especially true of schools in reorganized districts.

When asked to grade the schools, both teachers and patrons tended to give a grade of B. Patrons assigned slightly higher grades than did teachers. Most, obviously, tended to regard their schools as somewhat above average, but the comparison group ("in Nebraska," "in this area," etc.) was never made quite clear. When pressed for evidence, they pointed to SAT scores (on which Nebraska in most years ranks in about the top five or 10 states), success in college, and achievement in a variety of scholastic competitions.

English, science, and math are most frequently identified as areas of strength in the curriculum, and this was true for both public and parochial schools. Social studies, computer science, and fine arts tended to be regarded as areas of strength somewhat less frequently, but the proportion of favorable rating for them was somewhat higher in the Catholic schools. Thus the areas necessary to local understanding and often to economic and cultural growth are rated lower. Interestingly, English was also mentioned rather frequently as an area of weakness, though less frequently than as an area of strength, and more often in public schools than in parochial schools.

Social studies and foreign languages were quite often mentioned as *weak* areas, as were counseling, computer science, and vocational education. In the smaller schools in the sample, a curriculum area might be regarded as a strong area one year and a weak one the next, depending upon the quality of the teacher employed in that area. Since in such schools there was usually one teacher for each curriculum area, a student could not escape a weak teacher by enrolling in a section taught by a stronger one in the same area.

Interviewees were asked to identify some outstanding graduates of their school. In response to this question they were inclined to identify professional and executive types more frequently than people pursuing other careers. Sometimes farmers, ranchers, local business people, and even parents were pointed to as outstanding. *Overwhelmingly, however, people who left the community to pursue careers in the city had a much better chance of being identified as outstanding than did local citizens.* Given the perceived lack of opportunity in the local community referred to earlier, this is understandable, yet troubling.

The discovery that Nebraska schools were educating people out of Nebraska is not new. Professor Galen Saylor of UNL's Teachers College studied high school graduates in Fillmore County in the 1950s. He found that students finishing in the upper quartile of their graduating class were much more likely to leave the local community to pursue urban careers than were the graduates in any other quartile.[16] The fact that, in many cases, the "brightest and best" are leaving the town and region should not be made the responsibility of teachers and administrators alone. School boards and citizens bear ultimate responsibility for the schools. However, they are not "to blame" either. What the Goldenstein/Ronning/Walter research and the Saylor research both point to is a problem. The problem is that small towns have been so eroded by economic forces that they have little confidence that they ought to retain their own youth in many cases. The concomitant problem is that small schools have felt themselves to be competing with large schools not only in the matter of achievement but in the style of schooling that they offer. They have not had a chance to think through what unique strengths small schools have. They have rarely been presented with alternative community-based models of how education might work. Neither schools nor communities are, in a direct sense, responsible. What is responsible is the development of an imperfect match between the culture of the schools and the culture of the communities as both come under extreme pressure from different outside forces.

Such impressions and quantitative data raise some important questions for community and school leaders in rural Nebraska.

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- √ Are the schools in rural areas inadvertently promoting a "brain drain" from their home communities? Or are they resignedly admitting that the local community can offer little or no opportunity for their "best and brightest"?

- √ Is the present curriculum flexible enough to provide for the needs and aspirations of students who will remain in their home community after graduation, as well as those who will seek careers elsewhere? Or is the local curriculum a generic curriculum that largely ignores the needs of the young people who elect to become productive citizens of their home community?

- √ Is the input of current students and recent graduates sought in planning curricula designed to meet the needs of all students, those who stay as well as those who leave?

- √ What can be done to retain the services of excellent teachers so that the quality of teaching in a given area does not quickly vacillate from year to year as teachers seek to move to larger communities in the hope of earning higher salaries?

- √ Finally, what kinds of implications are suggested by the Ronning/Walter/Goldenstein research and similar kinds of curricular research? What kinds of conclusions may be drawn from such research? What kinds of curriculum recommendations does such research assist us in making?

This particular research did not involve the elementary schools. It would be very helpful to have more research regarding the curriculum at that level. At that level some very basic attitudes are formed and interests developed. This should provide opportunity to put into effect the slogan of thinking responsibly and acting on local as well as national and international issues.

Schools in rural Nebraska appeared to be giving greater attention to agriculture and home economics instruction in 1983 than they did 30 years earlier. This suggests that the schools were growing more attentive to community needs in these two areas. There is some evidence, not necessarily revealed by this particular research, that the vocational agriculture curriculum of today is both broader in its scope and somewhat more oriented to local conditions than it was in the past. Whether the newer vocational agriculture curricula generally reflect an appropriate concern for the environment or integrate such developments as organic farming and sustainable agriculture information into the whole agriculture curriculum, we cannot say without further investigation. We do know that the work with the schools of the "Ag in the Classroom" program does increasingly pay attention to environmental issues and issues of sustainability.[17] This program, promoted through the UNL College of Agriculture, the Nebraska Farm Bureau, and the Nebraska Departments of Agriculture and Education, sponsors a series of summer institutes working with teachers to incorporate agricultural content into other areas of the curriculum.

We are unclear as to the changes that have occurred in home economics education, although we suspect that curriculum has become broadened and somewhat more "scientific" in recent decades. We are convinced, however, that schools keep inadequate curricular records, that better records would help school officials, patrons, and curriculum researchers to understand more fully what really takes place in the rural classrooms of Nebraska.

The kind of curriculum research to which we have referred also fails to tell us what schools do to help students understand their local community. We suspect that little attention is given to local history and cultural developments and the achievements of local artists, writers, musicians, and inventors. We have no knowledge of the extent to which local newspapers, diaries, and other local materials find their way into the curriculum. The research that we have described at some length suggests that rural curricula do respond to national crises, particularly as they are articulated by the critics of American education. They may be less attentive to the mechanisms underlying local crises such as the 1980's farm crisis. We do not know what attention local curricula give to international and national issues that underlie the local crises.

VII. An Approach to Building Curriculum For Rural Community Based Schools

Several scholars and teachers have suggested that students learn most when they have responsibility for real problems in their surroundings

and have to think their way through to real solutions. We believe that, in developing the double mission of the rural schools, much of the curriculum can come from the strengths and problems of the rural towns and the countryside. This approach is indirectly suggested in the work of John Dewey in *School and Society* and *Democracy and Education*, and, at a more abstract level, in the work of Jean Piaget in his *To Understand is to Invent*.[18]

Concrete examples of the making of rural community schools are described in the writings of particularly creative rural teachers such as Sylvia Ashton-Warner who worked with the Maori in New Zealand,[19] the work of the Infant School educators in Lancastershire in England, of Julia Weber who wrote *My Country School Diary*, Jesse Stuart who wrote *The Thread that Runs so True* and of Everett Webber who wrote *Backwoods Teacher*.[20] Two books by Theodore Brameld, while not addressed to readers in rural areas, contain some excellent ideas for designing curricula to fit the community. They are *Education as Power* and *Toward a Reconstructed Philosophy of Education*.[21]

Three publications, "Democracy in U.S. Schools" concerning the Deatsville, Alabama schools,[22] Walter Beggs' *Community Schools for Nebraska* concerning Nebraska schools,[23] and the Foxfire books, are also guides to what we are talking about.[24] However, we can also find examples of what we are talking about in Nebraska and adjacent states right now by looking at outstanding work in one or another discipline or in the organization of whole schools.

A. Language, Reading and Literature: Nebraskans have long prided themselves on their high rates of literacy, and their pride is justified. The number of grades completed by the average citizen is generally regarded now as the best index of literacy, and Nebraska's people have always ranked high on literacy scales (though functional literacy is more of a problem). Fewer than 10 percent of Nebraska's citizens are estimated to be illiterate.[25] Furthermore, Nebraska students in many schools read a fairly large number of good books -- classics so to speak -- and projects such as the Nebraska Writing Project have made writing a regular and meaningful part of the curriculum of the schools.

However, it is not clear that many students emerge from the schools loving reading or writing or having much sense of how these skills could relate to the building of local community. For example, one curriculum for grades nine-twelve from a rural high school includes an indication that students are to have skills in library use, giving speeches, vocabulary, the mechanics of writing sentences and paragraphs and a variety of kinds of papers. However, the curriculum for writing does not include any analysis of where writing and making speeches are used in the community -- at the local paper, in grain elevator bulletins, from the pulpit, in civic clubs, in debates over environmental policy and the like.[26]

Students are not encouraged, so far as we can see, to look at what their community needs or demands in the way of language skills, and they are not asked to take advantage of smallness by trying out their language skills in local community debates and activities. This is not to say that such trial does not occur. It is to say that it is not part of the formal written curriculum.

Again, the literature curriculum suggests that students should read *Romeo and Juliet, Antigone, A Tale of Two Cities, Julius Caesar, Medea, Twelve Angry Men, One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovic, The Glass Menagerie, Oedipus the King*, a variety of short stories and other shorter works. Whereas these works are all fine examinations of perennial human dilemmas, they are predominantly urban or existential in orientation and are not the only kinds of works from which rural students could learn. The notion that farming is an important subject for literature is as old as Virgil's *Georgics* and as young as the poetry of William Kloefkorn or Wendell Berry. Nebraska students from the farm and rural community could certainly learn from the novels and prose works of Willa Cather, Ole Rolvaag, Sophus Winther, Wright Morris, and Marie Sandoz.

In addition, every part of the state has its own minor writers, as a bibliography of Nebraska writers by Emily Uzendoski makes clear.[27] However, the writing studied need not all be Nebraska or Great Plains work to be useful in the sense we are describing. Wherever people are dealing with the earth, with the soil, with the tragedy and comedy of rural community and farm life, whether in William Faulkner or Wendell Berry or Larry McMurtry or

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George Eliot or Flannery O'Connor, there is something to be had that is as fine as in the works listed above and useful to the rural students' pursuit of meaning for their experience. Obviously students will not make the connections with their own lives if the teaching of the books is pedantic and does not invite them to make the connections.

Some of the students' reading and writing can come from exploring the resources of the local community. They can read what the local newspapers put out during the Populist Revolt of the 1890s, or during the depression and drought of the 1930s or during World War II. In many cases, diaries and letters from the past can be found and shared so as to give students a sense of what made the community or a person within the community tick. These have proved particularly fruitful in Center for Great Plains Studies teaching at the University of Nebraska and should prove even more so when used in the communities of their origin.

One Nebraska teacher, when exploring the settling of the West in her classes, asks her fifth grade students to interview the oldest person in their families -- to get down this person's account of his/her most frightening and memorable experiences, his/her experience of school and childhood jobs, his/her favorite childhood meals, and his/ her memories of significant weddings and funerals. In short the students are asked to take down peak experiences from their elders.

The students then make a book of these experiences. They may illustrate it. And they invite the family to school for an old fashioned repast of cookies and lemonade, a reading of the stories, and further recollections. If books are not made, the recollections may be turned into a musical interpretation with slide projections of pictures from the families' old photo albums.

The same teacher has students collect oral history and folklore, weather lore, medicine lore, good luck-bad luck signals, and stories told about great characters or events within the community that have passed over into myth. The children are also asked to inspect the accuracy of these myths without condescending to the past. Through such a process, the young people are invited to root themselves in an inter-generational twining.

B. Social Studies and History: Nebraska has always had a Nebraska history requirement, generally one taught in the eighth grade. This is a good beginning, but it may be both too narrow and too broad. It may be too narrow in that state boundaries are not always the best ways to begin studying a particular place. Communities in Nebraska are, save for Native American communities, products of the 1850-1920 immigration west of the Missouri River that filled up the whole of the Great Plains from Texas to Canada and also filled up similar semi-arid regions around the world with European-based people.

Students could first of all study how the Native American peoples lived in this kind of environment so that they would have a sense of how it might be treated without industrial exploitation. They could also learn something about the history of the evolution of farming and rural communities in the Great Plains -- about such matters as ethnicity, railroads, soil quality, rainfall, and farm prices as factors in Great Plains settlement. They could explore the role of Native American, Asian, Black, and Hispanic workers in the making of the Plains. They could learn why counties like Custer County had approximately twice as many people in the 1890s as they do now and what the forces are that have torn people from their settlements.[28] However, in the context of the larger picture, they ought to learn to know their own community -- how people suffered and survived on sparsity to create it.

One teacher in Central Nebraska has his students do intensive research projects using primary materials on the history and culture of the community from which they come. The students do interviews with old people. They work with old newspapers and archival materials, visit old buildings and reconstruct what they were once for, and they endeavor to reconstruct the cultural and economic life of the community from which they come in some past epoch. Thus they learn to be historians and at the same time experience a kind of rooting in their communities.

Similar kinds of work to understand the community and community issues could well be included in political science, social science, sociology and anthropology courses. Such work could make use of local historical societies and museums as well as newspapers, family resources and church or organizational archives.

C. Art and Music Education and the Community: The arts are often among the most difficult subjects to teach in rural schools and have less than fully satisfactory results if the Ronning/Goldenstein/Walter study is accurate. "What good is this going to do?" asks the junior high art student. "I'm going to be an engineer." The same type of question is repeated in the study of the various artistic disciplines throughout the school year by numerous students. Yet, nothing more roots a people in an area than the artistic forms that belong to it.

The practice of one of our own committee members, Linda Abboud, suggests some of the promise of community based education in the area of art. Twelve years ago she began teaching art classes to junior and senior high school students in a rural Class B school. She began to examine the way she taught and the way art classes had traditionally been taught there. She asked herself why she taught art and looked seriously at her curriculum. Because she was bound by the expectations of academic understandings of art education, she was product oriented, obsessed with teaching the elements of design, organizing principles, the various media, and a smattering of art history. However, she was also a practicing artist, and in her own work she loved the *processes* of creation and asked herself how she could communicate this love to her students in such a way as to connect them with their everyday lives in a rural community. This is how she tells the story:

"I began to see true art as the communication of meaning -- the meaning of social systems, of beliefs and rituals, and of ideas about human relationships. Art spoke through the use of tangible materials such as paint, charcoal, clay, brick, stone, metal, glass, fiber and the like. I asked myself what this organization of materials in form and texture and color could communicate in different times and places and cultures."[29]

Abboud's reflections led her to a restructuring of her junior high school classes. She prepared units of study in prehistoric cave art, in the art of ancient Egypt, fifth century Greece, first century Rome, the early Christians, and in Medieval, Renaissance, and Modern art for her seventh graders. She used as her resources art history, mythology, stories, poetry, anthropology, and archeology. She found that her ideas were more expansive than her time and energy. However, gradually she learned to coordinate her students' work in art with work in their Social Studies classes. Students studying the Roman wars might also be designing bridges in clay, coliseums and temples in cardboard, and frescoed murals in one or another paint medium. During these early years, she discovered an opportunity to involve her art students in designing and painting a 200 foot supergraphic design for a gym wall and two mosaic wall panels for the city auditorium.

The auditorium mosaics incorporated the agricultural symbols of rural community life and allowed for an opportunity to make meaningful connections between the symbols on the mural and symbols significant to agricultural peoples in other places, times and cultures. The creation of these symbols of other times took five years to design and execute, but the students learned from them and community buildings were also beautified.

Abboud found that her students and she could create images of their own place while looking at lives distant in time and place. They could look at their own cultural symbols and rituals: water towers, church rituals, fat cattle and corn while interpreting cave wall paintings. Self-portraits could lead to an exploration of the Renaissance rise of individualism and its reflection in Renaissance self-portraiture. A paper-making project might lead to examination of Egyptian papyrus-making, the pyramidal structure of ancient Egyptian society, the afterlife and making of mummies then, and the need for recycling trees now. Thus Abboud used projects to make connections between herself, her students and their community and to connect their sense of the meaning of life with that of people in other ages as they looked at issues of peace and justice, ecology and environment, and, perhaps most importantly, community survival. All of this is accompanied by serious writing projects in which the students are asked to make explicit the connection between their own culture and that of another time.

Part of Abboud's process involves making the students feel that they can do for themselves. For instance, an artist from a neighboring community bought some Navajo-Churo sheep, her spinning wheels, many cultures' looms, and organically dyed yams to the school. She spent days weaving with the students and telling tales of her travels to learn the

spinning practices of many different cultures. A poet such as William Kloefkorn may be the center of the development of an art project, or a local pottery artist, or a local Native American story teller may serve the same role. Abboud approached eighth grade classes through similar thematized projects dealing with Native American cultures of the Southwest, Plains, Northwest, and South America. She developed these projects around various Indian designs and media and then built them through story-telling from the cultures studied, including works by Native American story tellers or Anglo ones deeply immersed in Native American cultures such as Mari Sandoz. All of this activity was supported by assistance from the media center that made available slides and stories illustrating the character of the various communities and civilizations studied. Through studying other cultures and creating for their own, the students achieved a sense of place and roots.

Some of the same kind of work could be done in music through exploring the modes of music known in other cultures and those used on the Plains: Native American music, cowboy songs, depression songs and the like. Some communities have restored their old opera houses, and when this is done, students could be involved both in the restoration and in discovering what musical life went on in such houses. Church music, band music, and Kansas City jazz, all are part of the pasts of many Nebraska communities and can give students a sense of where the things that they are hearing now came from.

D. Science and Mathematics: Science and mathematics may appear to have no specific place or time. Indeed what makes them what they are is that their truths are not temporally or spatially bound. However, most instruction in mathematics and science is instruction in applied versions of these, and all students have had experience with story problems in mathematics that are based on real world situations. The use of Cusenaire rods and other concrete math apparatus is clearly an effort to make mathematics concrete and "real." The kind of art project described above also calls into play mathematics skills as does any construction effort of which children and youth can become a part either in imagination or actuality. Much architectural work from the past is rather carefully based on theory of proportions and trigonometric conceptions and the reconstruction of the conceptions underlying old buildings evoke math skills.

In the area of science teaching, Nebraska has an excellent college example of science rooted to place, in the form of John Janovy's Keith County books that grow out of Janovy's efforts to teach others and himself biological science and parasitology at the Cedar Point Center. Science teachers could be asked to read these books and consider what they could do in their own areas that would introduce students to scientific methods and problem-solving analogous to the Cedar Point experience. They could ask their students to work with environmental problems, with a local wetlands area, with Sandhill crane habitat or whatever. The possibilities are legion.

One recent television program featured a Nebraska grade school teacher who made the center of her science lesson an examination of the water problems in her area, a unit that included looking at the geology of the Ogallala aquifer, water testing, looking at the kinds and causes of water pollution and the like. Certainly in farm communities high school biology and chemistry courses could include projects looking at the arguments for sustainable and industrial agriculture that would include soil and water testing projects, analyses of principles of ecosystem complexity and companion planting in fanning, and examination of wildlife management principles. Economics courses could took at world food supply issues related to alternative forms of agriculture.

E. Vocational and Economic Education and Community Development: One of the books that is having some impact on education methodology is *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paolo Freire,[30] and it is a book that is germane to Nebraska rural education. Freire's experience makes it clear that economic and vocational education cannot be confined to one discipline, and it cannot be prepackaged. Much of this book is based on Freire's experience in education with the rural poor of Recife Province in northeast Brazil. His essential point is that the oppressed must be participants in the educational process, not just receivers of information and concepts. The learning process involves doing things that affect the destiny of the students and communities as well as reflection on what one is doing. This kind of learning process makes education relevant to survival and the transformation of society.

While poverty conditions in rural Nebraska and rural America in general may not be as severe as those in Recife Province of Brazil, there is this parallel. For too many years rural people and rural communities in both countries have seen themselves as objects acted upon by larger forces in society. Though formally they have great freedom to plan their own schools, they often do not seize that freedom and use it for their own advantage. They may see their destinies are being determined in other places than the rural setting itself. This is the essence of what brings people under oppression and keeps them there.

As the writer of this section of our report reflected on his high school education and that of his son and daughter, he saw that for the most part he and they received a prepackaged curriculum based on a dysfunctional assumption about what the culture of rural schools ought to be. This is what Freire calls the banking concept of education. The teacher deposits in the minds of students what some authorities on each subject consider important. Vocational education has been a matter of training people to fill jobs and needs that someone else, other than the student, has defined.

This prepackaging mind-set may be reflected in the response the writer of the section got when he approached school administrators and teachers about what needed to happen in vocational education for more of our young people to stay in, or return to, their home communities. Inevitably the response was, "They have to have jobs here!" The school officials did not assume that the school could be an agent in the creation of jobs and of an interesting local culture.

The question is, "Who will create the jobs?" Many rural schools have excellent records in educating students who rank high in the achievement tests that are currently used. For example, Anselmo-Merna High School within whose district one of our committee members resides usually comes in first, second, or third in the Chadron Scholastic Contest. However, most of the high achieving students leave the community to fill jobs elsewhere. As one person mentioned, the FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) might more accurately be called the FBEA (Future Business Employees of America). While part of the function of vocational education will always be to prepare some people to fill jobs already in existence, this should by no means be seen as its total purpose, or even its most important role. Vocational education that relates to the local community can bring about an interest and investment that can lead to the creation of economic and cultural opportunities for self-employment which high school graduates pursue or return to after college.

One of our committee members was involved in a project that points in this direction. In the spring and summer of 1990, the Central Nebraska Sheep Producers worked with the vocational agriculture departments of four high schools (Sargent, Sandhills, Gothenburg and Arcadia) in making a video tape on sheep production. With ag instructors coaching, the students conducted the interviews of sheep producers at their farms and operated the equipment. This joint effort had two goals: to expand the knowledge of sheep production in the curriculum and to provide beginning experience in agricultural journalism.

The work of Edwin C. Nelson, President Emeritus of Chadron State College, is developing a new understanding of curriculum in vocational education. As reported in Small Town magazine,[31] Nelson has demonstrated how crucial the ideas, energy, and involvement of youth are to revitalizing rural communities. Through summer workshops, school board members, administrators, teachers, and students are coming up with innovative plans for revising curricula so that schools do a better job in strengthening the rural community. Nelson states, "School curricula will be revised to allow for more creativity and flexibility in responding to the real needs of the society at the local level as well as nationally and in the world as a whole."[32]

Nelson asks the question, "What can one do to make education exciting and relevant?" He is finding that young people get enthusiastic about their education and their communities when they get involved in the real world. They also bring great energy to their involvement. When they participate in committees and organizations beyond the school they make things happen.

F. Education for Community Economic Development: The school as a whole can also become a source of economic and cultural strength for the community. Here are a few examples

of involvement relating to the local community's economic structure, examples that do not come just from the vocational instructors:

- √ An art teacher at Cody, Nebraska, worked with her students and local businesses. The students developed ads for the businesses.

- √ At Bassett, Nebraska, a business teacher helped students do a computer inventory of the community, and then students who had more computer training and expertise than many adults in the town served as consultants.

- √ At Kimball, Nebraska, a sixth grade teacher had her class organize as a production company as they learned about economics. The class sold its products in town stores and the money went to the community development and beautification fund.

- √ At St. Francis Indian School in South Dakota, the Middle School Card Company was created and marketed various forms of greeting cards.

- √ At Stapleton, Nebraska, a home economics teacher helped her students establish and operate a youth center.[33]

These kinds of individual efforts can be combined in a total school thrust. Jim Doolittle, Superintendent of Schools at Belle Fourche, South Dakota, sees the importance of connecting classroom and community. He calls the process of doing so creating a "school without walls." Two teachers in his district, one in English and one in social studies led a course focusing on the community. To enhance and reinforce learning, students went into the community during school hours to do an internal audit. To complete this audit of community resources, they did primary research as well as using existing demographic data from census reports and other available material. One of these teachers also had a course on rural economics. Kids from the course got out into the community and did surveys on community needs. They then held hearings on the information gathered, and the data and the hearings became inputs for the development of community goals. At this same school the English, journalism and art departments worked together on history and story writing in the community. The home economics instructor developed with her class an occupational food service program in which during two days of the week the students had an optional food line parallel to the regular lunch program. In studying entrepreneurship in the same school, a student set up a breakfast program and yet another student made arrangements to use the school facilities in a baking enterprise that led to the marketing of items in the local supermarket.[34]

The accomplishments at Belle Fourche have been helpful to the whole community. Recently high school students, with the leadership of their teachers did the community study in the GOLD Project (Governor's Opportunity for Local Development). In this study a complete plan for the community was developed. Now if an employer is considering starting a business in Belle Fourche the mayor will send such a person to the school, and *students* will assist the business leader in community surveys, marketing plans, and development of the business.[35]

Mr. Doolittle observes that, through these education experiences and enterprises, students learn how to create jobs and fill needs, not just find a job. They also build their confidence, get to know their community, and become committed to it.

Indeed, Nebraskans interested in rural community based education need to take note of South Dakota's example. A variety of entities other than the local school district are working together for change. For example, in western South Dakota, under the auspices of the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative (similar to an educational service unit in Nebraska), school district leaders, teachers and students, local businesses, local governing officials and state government have worked together to produce a movement toward rural community-based education. Terry Albers, staff member with the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative, is Field Director for the state's $1.3 million School Modernization Project. Its goal is to improve student performance in three R's but not the traditional three R's. The modernization project's three R's are reaching maximum student performance, revitalizing education and *relinking schools and communities*. This project has picked up and expanded the kinds of things that

James Doolittle, Edwin Nelson,, and those who have worked with them have spearheaded, and it is presently working with 10 schools.[36]

Here at home, the experiences of Gene Severens and Rose Jaspersen in the Rural Economic Assistance Program (REAP) of the Center For Rural Affairs at Walthill, Nebraska, point to the need for elementary and secondary education in developing entrepreneurial skills within the local community. The REAP project, partially an adult education project, assists clusters of rural communities in developing their economies through the creation of revolving funds that assist in the development of small businesses. The persons who borrow from the revolving fund also monitor one another's enterprises and critique one another's financial, marketing, and product plans. Severens and Jaspersen have observed that in Nebraska rural and small town educational systems little attention is given to the idea that a person might become self-employed. Thus, many people do not have economic survival skills except as they are employed by someone else. In response to this need, Ms. Jaspersen has developed with Norfolk Community College a course in entrepreneurship that builds on REAP program experience. This five session course for people without business background deals with goal setting, marketing, advertising, customer relations, and financial management. It seems to this committee important that similar courses in entrepreneurship and even efforts to develop enterprises from revolving fund groups should be offered in rural high schools and other community colleges.

Courses in entrepreneurship can be exciting. The publication, *The Real* Story, devoted a major portion of its winter 1988/89 issue to the matter of developing entrepreneurs through the schools. One article, "Blueprint for Entrepreneurship in Your School," outlines three steps that students must study: 1. How to begin getting organized and deciding what to do; 2. Business plans -- deciding how to do it, getting start-up capital; 3. Operating a business -- filling real needs, matters of liability, community perceptions and accountability. Two examples of businesses that were developed in relation to such courses are the Way-Off Broadway Delicatessen created by a group of rural high school students at St. Paul High School in St. Paul, North Carolina, and an employment service started by students at Harding County High School in Harding County, South Dakota. This latter business was a part of the social studies class, and the article indicates that "parents report that conversations at home have moved from the usual, 'How was school? 'Fine.' 'What did you do 'Nothing', to excited students bursting with new information who monopolize conversations at home on issues such as the social boundaries in the community, the county system for licensing and permits, the history and settlement patterns of the town, the recalcitrance of the fire marshal, the problems of cash-flow and, indeed, the surprising number of businesses in the county."[37] There is the potential in every area of study to make linkages with the local community that become an integral part of the learning process. This kind of curriculum development leads to vocational education at its best.

One member of the State Board of Education who read this paper also suggested that another way to overcome the walls between the school and the community is to invite into the school local models of intellectual and vocational competence. Persons who are interested in soil and water issues -- farmers, Natural Resource District people, county agents, or local soil testing people -- could be invited into the school for a period to work with the students on a soil-and-water testing unit in a Chemistry class just to illustrate the level of intellectual competence needed for modern farming. The same method could allow local business or farm people to illustrate how they form budgets and develop an appropriate accounting system. Local artists, historians, musicians, and ecologists could also teach or co-teach units in the school to model the levels of intellectual excellence required on the local scene and to give students a sense of the scale of the local challenge.

Appendix A

Bibliographical Resources for the Study of Community-Based Education

I. Past analyses: *Life*, 10:68-71, 13 January 1941; Jesse Stuart, *The Thread That Runs So True* (New York: Scribners, 1949); Joseph Nelson (pseudonym for Everett Webber), *Backwoods Teacher* (New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1949); Julia Weber, My *Country School Diary* (New York: Harper and Brothers, *1946).* These works deal with other situations at other times and have an indirect relevance to revitalized schools in rural Nebraska. They deal with teachers or school administrators who faced a serious challenge in making their instruction relevant and meaningful to their students and to the communities they served. In meeting that challenge, they transformed the school into an agency of community revitalization. While the situations are different, they all demonstrate some principles that, with imagination, can be applied in rural Nebraska to help build community pride and productivity. The *Life* magazine article deals with a turnaround in the curriculum of Holtville High School in a tiny village about 25 miles from Montgomery, Alabama. There a new principal, John Chrietzberg, provided the impetus that made the curriculum relevant to a community that lacked pride in itself and had been unable to revitalize itself. Within a few years, under the new principal's leadership, a widespread problem of meat spoilage had been addressed by the creation of a community slaughterhouse and refrigeration plant operated by the school's agriculture program. It also created a cannery to preserve fruits and vegetables, an enterprise that, on the average, added $300 to the annual income of farm families. The school also initiated a tree planting program, provided barber and health services, and developed plumbing and electrical expertise that was put to use in community building and renovation projects. Principal and teachers, working with students, stimulated the use of the talents, energy, and brains of young people in the service of their community.

Jesse Stuart, in *The Thread That Runs So True,* provides a series of interesting vignettes, some certainly unorthodox by today's standards, from his career as an elementary and secondary school teacher, principal, and superintendent of schools in a rural area of Kentucky. Much of his work and many of his activities may seem out of date to us, but he used an imaginative talent to help promote personal hygiene, entice young adults to acquire the mathematical skills to measure their land, their loads of coal and other commodities. He promoted cooperative learning and problem-solving by making lessons relevant to the students' environment and by becoming a part of the communities he served as a teacher and administrator.

Big Piney, the setting for Everett Webber's *Backwoods Teacher*, is far from rural Nebraska in space and time. Set in a backwoods region in the Depression era, it is the story of a college graduate who, in desperation, goes to a one-room, eight-grade school to teach a group of reluctant learners. Employing some creative approaches, such as having his students study local language habits and tracing them back to older versions of English, he arouses the interest of his students (and often of the parents, too) and becomes an integral part of the community he serves. In doing so, he helps to change the community and is, in turn, changed by the community.

Julia Weber's *Country School Diary* details her experiences with an average of about 30 pupils in an eight-grade, one-room rural school 1936 through 1939. In her prelude, the author indicates her intent to report on a way of living and working with children. Strongly committed to practical lessons in democratic living, she enlists student help in planning and initiating such activities as working in the library, raising and lowering the flag, watering the school plants, and writing about local events and surroundings. She successfully solicits the help of community people with such special skills as carpentry and sewing and promoted community pride by involving elders in the preparation of a community history. She also introduces her students to the work of such community helpers as the agriculture and home extension agents, the 4-H club leaders, the rural nurse, and others.

II. Nebraska analysis: Walter K. Beggs and others, *Community Schools for Nebraska* ([Contributions to Education Number 21] Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Teachers College, 1944). Like some of the other references suggested in this paper, this bulletin of 77 pages is nearly a half century old. Within a decade of its publication the emphasis on rural education shifted to consolidation or reorganization of school districts. Unfortunately, since then there has been a dearth of literature advocating genuine community schools for Nebraska rural areas. This publication, however, stands on its own merits, its age notwithstanding. Its major thesis is that the

school has a vital role to play in community revitalization. A quote seems to make the point that what the authors wrote in 1944 is still very relevant:

"Our communities are losing their vitality and are failing even to approach their possibilities as centers for family, cultural, and economic life. Neither the schools nor the educators who are a part of them are entering, for the most part, into community living in any vital way. These conditions need not prevail. We have the intelligence and the potential leadership required to build a better state."

Interestingly, the authors cite *The Story of Holtville* by Whidden Wallace, James Chreitzberg, and Werner Sims, published by Vanderbilt University of Nashville, Tennessee, in 1944 and indicate that anyone interested in school/community cooperation would be inspired by the Holtville example. Center members and supporters should welcome the authors' position that communities should assume responsibility for providing employment opportunities for their young people and that they should actively involve their schools in this effort. A practical suggestion they advance is the creation of widely representative community councils to address issues of this nature.

III. Size, Finances and Quality: Daryl Hobbs, "Rural School Improvement: Bigger or Better?" *Journal of State Government* (1989), pp. 22-28; "Relationships between School and School District Size, Educational Costs and Student Performance: A Review of the Literature," Unpublished paper prepared at the request of the Southwest Education Development Laboratory (Austin, Texas, January, 1989). In these two pieces, Hobbs examines the literature on school size and finds no statistically significant relationship between school enrollment and several measures of educational outcome. He notes that SAT and ACT scores have declined during a time of massive school district reorganization but that the percentage of children from families living below the poverty line has also increased during the same period. He suggests that "policy makers need to re-think the long standing commitment to a dominant school model. Circumstances dictate that such a model cannot be fully sustained in any rural localities."

Endnotes

(1) Cf. Dirk Johnson, "Forget the Last Picture Show, in Some Towns the Bank and the Schools are Closing, Too," *New York Times* (August 18, 1991): section 4, p. 2.

(2) Almost half of Nebraska's counties lost from 12 percent to 26 percent of their population in the 1980-1990 period.

(3) *Business in Nebraska* (November December, 1991), pp. 1-3.

(4) The lack of a serious educational answer to rural community declines is, in our minds, a subspecies of the lack of a general rural development policy in this country since the 1950s when the need for such policies first became apparent. For a useful analysis of this see Lauren Soth, "U. S. has farm program but no rural development policy," *Lincoln Journal-Star* (October 13, 1991): section B,7. For an account of the destruction of small towns in the period 1950-1990, see Dirk Johnson, "Forget the Last Picture Show," *New York Times* (August 18, 199 1): section 4:2. This essay includes some account of the present project of the Center for Rural Affairs.

(5) The existence of the Nebraska Rural Community Schools Association, headed by Glen L. Larsen of Hastings, is an encouraging sign as is the creation of the University of Nebraska at Kearney's Rural Education Center.

(6) Though there is some truth to the claim that it is difficult for young people to find jobs in small towns in the Northern Plains, jobs are not easy to come by anywhere now. We recognize that the pressure of public policy has directed funds for economic development largely to the urban centers. Federal tax and subsidy policy has given an advantage to large and corporate farmers and increased the average size of farms from the homesteaders' 160 acres to average sizes many times that. However, diversified sustainable farming with reduced inputs can be profitable on farms considerably smaller than those common today. See Marty Strange, *Family Farming* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), passim.

(7) This data comes from the National Center For Education Statistics, 1987-88 compilation.

(8) Erwin Goldenstein, Royce Ronning and Jim Walter, *Curriculum Change Across three decades in Nebraska*, manuscript being prepared for publication, available from Jim Walter, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Henzlik Hall, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska, 68588.

(9) Roger Barker and Paul Gump, *Big School, Small School; High School Size and Student Behavior* (Stanford Stanford University Press, 1964). For additional evidence see Daryl Hobbs, "Rural School Improvement: Bigger or Better?," *Journal of State Government* (1988): 22-28. For a full analysis of the literature on school and school district size and school performance, see by the same author, "Relationships between School and School District Size, Educational Costs and Student Performance: A Review of the Literature," Paper prepared for the Southwest Education Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas. Gump and Barker find a negative relationship between school size and individual student participation, and the other studies cited in the Hobbs papers tend to confirm the finding.

(10) Interestingly Theodore Sizer's "Horace" books, on the problems and possible reforms of American education, argue that American schools in general must be made much smaller if they are to be effective. Cf. Theodore Sizer, *Horace's Compromise* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984); cf. Sizer, *Horace's School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992). Sizer is the former dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education and has visited thousands of American schools in recent years, including schools in Nebraska.

(11) Cf. Grant Wiggins, "The Futility of Trying to Teach Everything of Importance," *Educational Leadership* (November, 1989): 44-59.

(12) For some examples and theoretical papers in this area, see Paul A. Olson and others, *Of Education and Human Community* (Lincoln, Ne.: NCDC, 1972): *passim*.

(13) One person who has been a rural teacher and is now a teacher trainer reviewed this document. She indicated to us that there may be a hazard in integrating teachers into the community in the wrong way, one that calls on them to do a lot of busy work and does not allow them to teach effectively by allowing time for planning and studying:

> [Teachers] are connected in all sorts of ways to their students' lives outside the regular classroom, but they are so responsible for the life of the school, they no longer have time to be readers or writers because they're coaching volleyball or selling popcorn at basketball games or sponsoring the drama club. Year after year, teachers tell me that they have no time for reading in their lives, much less time for writing. Many of them are not reading...
>
> Obviously this report is not calling for busy work but serious intellectual work and work on community development to integrate the school and the community. One intelligent way to bring parents and elders into the school is to have them act as sponsors of some activities though they too should be asked to perform more serious tasks also.

(14) J. H. Van den Berg, *The Changing Nature of Man* (Metabletica) (New York: W. W. Norton, 1961): 161-71; cf. notes 40-5 1, pp.248 -49.

(15) Goldenstein, Ronning and Walter, *Curriculum change across Three Decades in Nebraska*, passim.

(16) J. Galen Saylor, "Migration of High School graduates of Fillmore County, Nebraska" (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, Department of Secondary Education, 1960): mimeographed.

(17) For information about this program contact Ellen Hellerich at (402) 421-4400 or at 5225 So. 16th St., Box 80299, Lincoln, NE. 68501.

(18) See John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1899); *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1916); and Jean Piaget, To *Understand is to Invent: The Future of Education* (New York, Grossman, 1973).

(19) Sylvia Ashton-Warner, *Teacher* (London: Virago, 1980): passim.

(20) Julia Weber, My *Country School Diary* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946); Everett Webber (pseudonym Joseph Nelson), *Backwoods Teacher* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1949); and Jesse Stuart, *The Thread that Runs So True* (New York: Scribners, 1949).

(21) Theodore Brameld, Toward *a Reconstructed Philosophy of Education* (New York, Dryden Press, 1956) and *Education as Power* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965).

(22) *Life*, 10:68-71, 13 January 1941.

(23) Walter K. Beggs and others, *Community Schools for Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Teachers College, Contributions to Education, No. 21, 1944).

(24) The Foxfire books are a series of books created on the basis of community-based education in Appalachia and reflect the entire culture of traditional Appalachian people: belief system, literature, construction practices, diet and the like. Cf. John L. Puckett, *Foxfire Reconsidered* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989): passim.

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(25) This estimate comes from Project Literacy based on a U.S. Department of Education study. The state's 9 percent literacy rate places it just 3 percent above Utah, the state with the largest percentage of literate citizens. In contrast, several states have an illiteracy rate about twice as high.

(26) We omit mention of the school district that produced this curriculum because we do not wish to single out any district for blame. Moreover, it is a rather typical curriculum in use in a rural district, better than many.

(27) Emily Jane Uzendoski, A *Handlist of Nebraska Authors* (unpublished University of Nebraska Ph. D. dissertation, 1977; available University of Michigan dissertation microfilm series).

(28) Custer County had 21,677 people in 1890 and 13,877 people in 1980. It lost about 10 percent more population between 1980 and 1990. Some counties lost as much as 25 percent of their population in the period 1980-1990.

(29) This material was provided to the study group by Linda Abboud.

(30) Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

(31) Edwin C. Nelson, "No Town Has to Die: Promoting Leadership by Involving Youth In the Community," *Small Town*, September-October 1990.

(32) Ibid.,p. 24.

(33) "Community Revitalization Through the Schools," a summary report containing selected condensed versions of a variety of proposals, guides, and ideas prepared by participants in workshops in the summers of 1989 and 1990 at Chadron State College, Chadron, NE.

(34) Information acquired by telephone conversation on 10-8-91 with James Doolittle, Superintendent of Schools, 736 Jackson St., Belle Fourche, S. D. 57717.

(35) Information acquired by telephone conversation with Terry Albers on 11-12-91.

(36) Terry Albers is a staff member of the Black Hills Special Services Cooperative working in the area of rural education and development. P.O. Box 218, Sturgis, S. D. 57785.

(37) "Blueprint for Entrepreneurship in Your School," *The Real Story*, Winter 83-89: 23-29.

The "Why's" of our Work...

Vision

Our vision for community education suggests students studying place to become stewards of their community's environment and culture; preservers of their community's history; and builders of the community's future.

Sowing the Seeds

Our Earth

Students are present day naturalists and scientists working to preserve quality water, conserve soil, and learn how to better utilize technology.

Our Civil Good

Students are learning about citizenship through participating in local government activities and by growing their own student led youth networks.

Our Community Heritage

Students are learning about the history and culture of their communities through historical studies, oral histories, drama, writing, art.

Our Economy

Students are inventing and building new economic ventures as entrepreneurs, thus contributing to the economic vitality of their own and other communities.

"Schools can succeed in producing skilled and responsible citizens only when, first, the school itself, its principal and teachers, has a solitary concept of its mission; second, strong families are behind the children; & third, effective communities help to organize the families in support of the schools."

Robert Bellah, 1994, The Good Society

Work

- Engaging community people in conversations regarding school/community planning.
- Working with teachers to invent local curriculum that is relevant to place.
- Involving community members in development of public policies that advocates for quality place based schooling and healthy communities.
- Facilitating adult networks in order to influence in local economic development, community governance, and state-level public policy.

"A society transforms uninitiated and seemingly alien beings into trustees of its own resources and ideals."

John Dewey, 1916, Democracy and Education

Purpose

- To place the school at the center of the community to contribute to community renewal, culturally and economically.

School at the Center

Director: Jerry L. Hoffman
PO Box 880355
Lincoln, NE 68588-0355
Phone: (402) 483-6037
FAX: (402) 472-8317
E-mail: jh500222@alltel.net
Website: www.satc.unl.edu/SATC.html

Schools/Students Served:

The School at the Center works with schools throughout the entire state of Nebraska. Thirty rural communities, 26 K-12 school districts (serving 13,000 students), are involved in the work.

Background:

The communities served by the School at the Center face many challenges: the myth that larger schools are more efficient; the declining profitability of family farms; the belief that high culture exists in the cities but not in the countryside; that rural people are second-class citizens; and a system of education that does not take into account the context of the rural communities it serves.

Goals:

School at the Center works in many areas including community/school improvement planning; community-based curriculum and teaching in the areas of entrepreneurship and small business creation; conferences; alliances among rural economic, community development, and education organizations; initiatives in partnership with university and state colleges; and public policy advocacy and community organizing. To overcome challenges facing its communities, School at the Center is working to create systems of community-based education through reform of curriculum and instruction; redirecting state economic and community development resources such as block grants; working to change the way teachers and administrators are educated in colleges and universities; reforming in-school accreditation policies; researching the values and virtues of rural and small schools and communities, and forming alliances with rural and inner-city parents, organizers, and church groups.

Accomplishments:

Community plays an important role in the success of the work of School at the Center. Community members participate in curriculum development, teaching, and assessment; contribute to school organization policy and school finance/tax policy; support teacher and administrator in-service education; participate in the assessment of student work, which has value beyond the walls of the school; and consult on student-generated business plans and small business creation. In turn, the schools serve the community in many ways. Students and teachers have built new single-family and duplex homes, and have incubated small business start-ups - both school-based and community based - by students.

In Henderson and Albion, the schools have created access to financial capital through community foundations, and in Tryon, through a community-based credit union. Schools help communities celeb.ate cultural heritage and renew cultural traditions, practice environmental preservation and restoration, and engage young people in town planning and decision making. Schools and students have helped communities incorporate technology into research, work, and community life by developing community websites, providing AutoCAD housing blueprints, and producing professional videos and CD-ROMS.

Synopsis courtesy of the *Rural School and Community Trust.*

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

Origins of SatC NQ

At the 1999 Queensland Positive Rural Futures conference, two people from the School at the Center in Nebraska, one being the Director of the program, spoke about the positive outcomes of the initiative in the United States.

Both these people were later involved in a seminar held in Ravenshoe, North Queensland, where local people were introduced to the School at the Center program in more detail. This seminar was organised by the Northern Priority Country Area Program.

The close alignment of the focus of PCAP, the work of the Rural Education Research and Development Centre at James Cook University, the aspirations of local rural people, and the objectives and rigorous educational foundations of the School at the Center program, came together in a submission to the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services, seeking funding to trial the School at the Center program in Australia.

Funding for a small pilot project in North Queensland was approved in lateYR2000.

Target area for SatC pilot - Northern PCAP.

The pilot will involve a small number of volunteer schools mainly from the Northern PCAP area. Planning and information dissemination will be the main focus in early 2001 with participating schools finalised by Term 3, 2001. The trial will continue through 2002 with a final report and evaluation later that year.

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School at the Centre
North Queensland.

What will School at the Centre look like in North Queensland?

Obviously, there will be some differences between how School at the Center functions in Nebraska and how School at the Centre will work in North Queensland. Differences in school governance, how prescriptive the curriculum is, and differing systemic priorities (to name but a few variables) will give the School at the Centre Pilot Program a distinctive shape.

However, the core work of the School at the Center program will remain. It will be expressed in the first instance through a curriculum contextualisation process where the School at the Center recommendation that **20% of the curriculum should recognise place** will be used as the guideline.

> This should not be interpreted as the creation of a 'folk' curriculum. School at the Center makes a very strong point of using local content to **enhance learning outcomes**. It is appreciated that students also need the skills to live and perform in a modern world outside their own community. This is part of the explanation for the 20% guideline.
> Further to this, in Australia around 30% of the population is rural, so surely country people being able to see themselves in 20% of the curriculum is not too much to ask.

After the contextualisation process has begun, experience has shown that a number of community issues begin to surface during considerations of what local contexts best support the learning outcomes of the subject curriculum under examination.

> The School at the Centre Pilot project will work within normal curricula documents in use in local schools. It is most common in Queensland schools to find these documents organised around subject disciplines even though other ways of organising a curriculum are available - for example, an issues based curriculum.

As these community issues are identified in the contextualisation process, they are assessed from two standpoints. The first is whether or not the examination of this issue will contribute to the learning outcomes which are wanted to be achieved. The second is if the issue is one whereby the school and the students, by becoming involved, can make a positive contribution to the community.

The School at the Centre Pilot project will use the same 'seeds' as the School at the Center program does in Nebraska.

- Our earth
- Our civil good
- Our community heritage
- Our economy.

These 'seeds' give a neat way of considering both contextualisation and the possibilities of meaningful contribution to the community as part of the learning process.

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

What School at the Centre is NOT:

SatC is not about creating a folk curriculum.

SatC fully appreciates the need for rural students to be capable in today's world and the need for generic skills - hence the 20% guide.

Secondly, SatC is not about compromising the educational outcomes mandated in any curriculum.

Contextualisation should focus on those areas where enhancement of outcomes could be expected. Another reason for the 20% guideline.

Thirdly, SatC is not about synthetic or simulated learning situations.

Rather, SatC focuses on the construction of learning situations associated with real life (local community) issues.

Part of the challenge and the joy of SatC is being able to effectively link reality, curriculum, pedagogy, and learning outcomes.

Fourthly, SatC is not about making the school into a community development agency.

What SatC does is encourage students and their school to identify roles where they can make a contribution to the community *as part of their learning*.

Some form of community development is generally a natural and welcome secondary result.

> Often, the community sees only the welcome result of the contribution made by the school and the students without being aware of the rigorous educational analysis that is the basis of School at the Center planning. However, the link between good educational practice and community development is not coincidental. Recent research has uncovered cogent reasons for their close relationship.

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

How do I volunteer?

A school can express interest simply by sending an email to satc@jcu.edu.au . The email should include some details of the school and be signed by, or endorsed by, both the principal of the school and the president of the P&C/P&F/School Council.

This expression of interest places your school into the orientation and information phase of the pilot project (Step 1). Your school, through the principal, can then make a more informed decision about proceeding to be a full volunteer school for the pilot project (Step 2).

Your commitment

Step 1:	Organise a get-together where your staff can meet and hear from the SatC staff.
Step 2:	Give your staff time to elect whether or not they will volunteer, and to what extent - whole school, just certain grades etc.
Step 3:	Agree to the SatC protocols - particularly important regarding intellectual property.
Step 4:	Make some staff time available for training and preparation.
Ongoing:	Meet sundry costs for example duplication of materials for in-school use.
Ongoing:	Undertake to support the pilot project in your school over the time of the project

What SatC will provide:

1. Introductory workshop and site visit.
2. Resource folder about SatC and similar initiatives.
3. Assistance with the implementation of the SatC program at your school. This includes site visits, help with contextualisation and with instructional design.
4. Continued professional support via direct contact with SatC staff.
5. Further periodic site visits.
6. Assistance with program reflection and evaluation

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

Timelines

As at March, 2001.

In March 2001, detailed preliminary planning and information gathering will begin. The Northern Priority Country Area Program area committee will provide an advisory role in the final guidelines for evaluating volunteer schools for entry into the Pilot Project. PCAP members will also assist in increasing the level of awareness of the project in schools with whom they have contact. The SatC NQ management committee will be formed at the same time.

Both a Powerpoint presentation and an information kit about the *School at the Centre Pilot Project* will be available by mid March for PCAP endorsement.

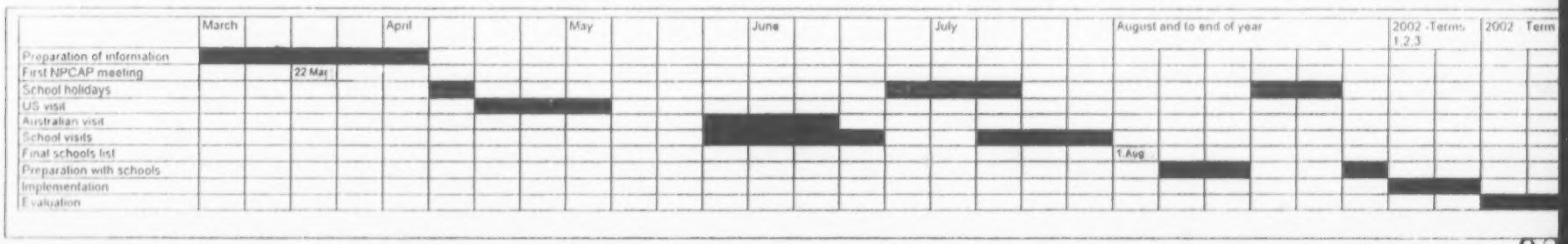
During April, a visit to the *School at the Center* in Nebraska will occur. This visit is to gain first hand experience of the program in action in its home place. From this trip, further information will be used to create a portfolio of examples of work. The educational foundations for School at the Center from both the Center staff viewpoint and that of teachers involved in the field will be further detailed. Insights will be gained from community representatives where School at the Center is happening. A number of face-to-face contacts will also provide a resource with whom teachers in North Queensland can communicate.

At the same time, schools considering volunteering for the Pilot Project may register their interest by sending an email to School at the Center at satc@jcu.edu.au

In May, the Director of *School at the Center* , Jerry Hoffman, will be in North Queensland to visit schools that have registered an interest in volunteering for the project. These visits are planned to provide additional information to schools so a final decision can be made about volunteering for a place on the Pilot Project. Jerry will also meet with student teachers at James Cook University during this time.

The final list of schools will be endorsed at the Northern PCAP area meeting of August 1st 2001, although preliminary implementation planning will have already begun with some schools during July. The rest of YR2001 will be taken up with site visits to schools to assist in curriculum contextualisation, the review of workbooks, and the identification of community issues where the school and its students could make a meaningful contribution to the community.

Terms 1, 2 and 3 YR2002 are the implementation phase with Term 4 YR2002 being set aside for evaluation.



School at the Centre
North Queensland.

SatC and the Adelaide Declaration.

At the 10th annual meeting of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs held in Adelaide, South Australia in April 1999, the State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education made an historic commitment to improving Australian Schooling. The commitment is known as the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century.*

The degree of commonality between the School at the Center program and the Adelaide Declaration is striking, both overall and in particular areas.

Some particular commonalities with the Adelaide Declaration preamble include:

> [School at the Center] [The Adelaide Declaration] ...by providing a supportive, nurturing environment, schooling contributes to the development of students' sense of self-worth, enthusiasm for learning and optimism for the future.
>
> ...further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community.

And in the Goals themselves, taking only the first few listed:

> 1.1 have the capacity for, the skills in, analysis and problem solving and the ability to communicate ideas and information, to plan and organise activities and to collaborate with others. SatC contribution to community.
> 1.2 have qualities of self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, and a commitment to personal excellence as a basis for their potential life roles as family, community and workforce members. SatC gives belief in value of rurality to rural students
> 1.4 be active and informed citizens with an understanding and appreciation of Australia's system of government and civic life. SatC 'seeds' - Our Civil Good.
> 1.7 have an understanding of, and concern for, stewardship of the natural environment, and the knowledge and skills to contribute to ecologically sustainable development. SatC 'seeds' - Our Own Earth.

However, School at the Center has as a key component something that is strangely missing from the Adelaide Declaration. This is in the area of Curriculum Goals.

The Adelaide Declaration does make mention of a 'comprehensive and balanced curriculum' but this is the closest the Declaration comes to the School at the Center philosophy that students should be able to see themselves and those they know in the curriculum (the 20% guideline).

In summary, then, the School at the Center program rests very comfortably with the nationally agreed Goals for Schooling, *The Adelaide Declaration*, and in the specific case of curriculum development, has an additional contribution to make to rural Australia.

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

SatC and the 1999 Regional Summit

In response to growing concerns over the future of rural Australia, the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services initiated the 1999 Regional Summit. This conference brought together people from rural and regional Australia, from all walks of life, to put together a vision for the future of non-metropolitan Australia. Not surprisingly, the role of education and training was a major focus of attention.

> The Summit recommended that *community planning should incorporate a local assessment of education and training needs, foster life long learning* and *extend partnerships with regional universities* and educational institutions. Local community research into, and planning of, education and training needs would provide a means of establishing *greater community ownership and enthusiasm for education and training*.
>
> Final Report, December 2000

This broad statement was further detailed with a number of policy issues and policy directions recognised.

> Issues
> - Policy must reflect and encourage strength and growth through the diversity of regional needs — *one size does not fit all*;
> - Education, training and lifelong learning must to be *tailored to fit* three sometimes competing sets of needs — individual, regional and national;
> - *There are 'walls' around education*, training and lifelong learning and other areas (eg. communities, industries) in policy and practical terms (e.g. Jargon, rules and procedures) that impede cooperation; and
> - Matching resources to needs: how best to provide education, training and lifelong *learning opportunities for regions and communities must be addressed individually*.
>
> Final Report, December 2000

And

> Direction
> - *Encouraging networks and partnerships* (strategic learning) within regions, between regions and the nation, between educational institutions and these institutions and communities, and between policymakers as well as between policy makers and regions and communities;
> - *Local planning* — policy formation should include strong regional and community input and involvement;
> - Education, training and learning provision needs to occur through *purpose-related cooperatively planned mechanisms, brokers who work across policy silos at the grass roots level*, including training brokers who identify needs and arrange appropriate education and training or learning programs, effective use of information technology and *other flexible learning methods*.
>
> Final Report, December 2000

With such strong commonality between School at the Centre and the recommendations from the Regional Summit, it would come as little surprise that the School at the Centre Pilot Project in North Queensland is funded by the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services under the Universities and Communities partnerships initiative.

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

SatC and Education 2010.

> Education needs something other than misconceived metaphors of decay, disaster and erosion as driving forces of change.
>
> QSE 2010 brochure.

Nowhere is this statement more applicable than in our rural communities which are generally portrayed as backward, limited, deficit and wanting, and buffeted by global forces beyond their control, compared to the opportunities and lifestyles available in the metropolitan world.

The School at the Center program emphatically asserts there is value and fulfilment available in rural lifestyles. Many people consciously choose to live outside the metropolitan rush, and as many choose not to move away from the contentment that is their known lifestyle.

To support this, School at the Center promotes value of place within the curriculum and seeks to enhance learning outcomes of students by allowing space in which they can see themselves and those they know in that curriculum. However, this is not done at the expense of quality education.

Further, SatC participant schools make an effort to contribute to their local communities - rather than treating the community as a support for the school. In the words of one teaching administrator *' we seek areas where we can make a gift to our town'.*

These *key components* of SatC contribute directly to 2010 outcomes.

> SatC schools are ... ***distinctive schools*** *that respond to community needs; embed* ***social outcomes*** *in curriculum;* and work as *community assets and centres for learning* by targeting ***community partnerships***.
>
> Students are provided with additional ***opportunities to learn*** based on their own knowledge and experiences and in the early years these opportunities provide ***new foundations*** *... that lay the grounds for future success in school.*
>
> SatC also provides support for participating teachers, giving attention to ***professional development*** and providing a vehicle for ***communication*** between partner schools. The focus on locality provides new scenarios that encourage *new ways for working and learning in a post-industrial environment,* and the closer links as a productive partner with the local community can contribute to enhancing the ***professional status of teachers*** in local eyes.
>
> And it is this latter that makes it all the more likely that a *new dialog will be built between teachers and parents, and between schools and their communities.* These relationships *are essential to both marketing your school and to improving the education it offers.*

School at the Centre in North Queensland aligns well with the philosophy and the practice of QSE 2010. Moreover, SatC has additional value as it is one of few projects that specifically targets rural schools and their communities while at the same time reflecting current educational directions in Queensland.

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

SatC and PCAP

The Country Area Program is a program funded by the Australian federal government. In Queensland, the initiative is known as the Priority Country Area Program, and in line with the Commonwealth, seeks to

> enhance the learning outcomes for students in geographically isolated areas so that their learning outcomes match those of other students.
>
> PCAP 2001-2004 Guidelines

PCAP seeks to do this by

> providing a range of activities and initiatives which enhance the educational achievements of geographically isolated students.
>
> PCAP 2001-2004 Guidelines

For administrative purposes, Queensland PCAP is divided into four geographic areas with Northern PCAP stretching from near Bowen in the south, north to the Torres Strait, and west to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Northern PCAP is further divided into nine local areas with decision-making responsibility over PCAP funding disbursement being devolved to this local level. This is to place decision-making as close as possible to the school communities that the local committees are drawn from.

Among a number of positive results that have flowed from this structure is a growing acknowledgment of the value of living in rural and isolated communities. Northern PCAP has moved strongly away from the 1970s deficit model of geographically isolated communities, to one that sees geograpically isolated communities as having many worthwhile strengths that should be celebrated while still appreciating the need for students to be comfortable and competent in modern metropolitan world.

This is the commonality that Northern PCAP shares with the School at the Center Program.

The two key concepts of SatC - twenty percent of the curriculum should reflect the importance of place, and schools should make a contribution to their host communities - is strongly reflected in the way PCAP projects are considered for eligibility for funding.

Projects should:

- Be complimentary to the curricula and be part of an integrated approach to learning outcomes
- Be regularly reviewed to ensure effectiveness so that the Program remains innovative and dynamic
- Promote the importance of education to parents and community groups
- Foster the involvement of parents, communities and community agencies

Small wonder, then, that Northern PCAP communities have responded enthusiastically to the chance to take part in the School at the Centre Pilot Project in North Queensland.

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

Authentic Pedagogy

Pedagogy, roughly defined, is about the science of teaching. It therefore encompasses the range of strategies a teacher may use to create a positive learning situation so that quality learning can take place.

Many of us have been regaled with stories about the authoritarian, inflexible, front-of-room, chalk-and-talk, exposition centred teacher.

> **Educators and reformers often worry that today's students spend too much of their time simply absorbing - and then reproducing - information transmitted to them... Students can earn credits, good grades and high test scores, they say, demonstrating a kind of mastery that frequently seems trivial, contrived or meaningless outside the school.**
>
> Newmann et al, 1995.

Contextualisation, and the further step of identifying local issues where the school could make a positive contribution to the community while achieving the prime role of education - that of achieving learning outcomes, are conducive to extending the learning strategies that teachers may use.

School at the Center teachers are more likely to use discussion, cooperative learning situations, problem based learning techniques, resource based lessons, and active student centred classrooms. In fact, what has been termed *authentic pedagogy* is more the norm for a class involved in School at the Center.

> **Authentic pedagogy [is] a way of thinking about and clearly identifying the key components of high quality teaching, learning and assessment.**
> **...intended to support the development of students as 'active learners'.**
>
> Crowther et al, 1999.

In fact, research work done at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on *authentic pedagogy* underpins the educational philosophy of School at the Center.

> **Authentic pedagogy has three essential elements:**
> ***construction of knowledge***
> ***disciplined inquiry***
> ***value beyond school.***
>
> Newman and Wehlage, 1994

It is the *authenticity* of learning situations that can be constructed from application of the School at the Center key components that contributes so much to learning outcomes. For School at the Center, through attention to contextualisation of the curriculum, allows space for students to see themselves and those they know in what they are learning; encourages teachers to use a greater teaching repertoire; and facilitates assessments that draw on what students know and have learnt - the core of authentic pedagogy.

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School at the Centre
North Queensland.

General Educational Considerations

The primary concern that resulted in the formation of the School at the Center program in Nebraska was the decline of rural communities and the devaluing of rural lifestyles.

It seemed entirely supportable that schools should be able to play a significant role in rural community revitalisation. They are often the last indicators of government investment in rural areas and one of the few local sources of people with the professional skills to find information for and assist local citizens with their lives.

It was thought that writing back into the curriculum some understanding of the value of place and rural lifestyles could also redress outmigration of youth, low self-esteem of rural youth, and create a new feeling of worth sadly missing to a great extent from country people.

This was the original focus of School at the Center, and remains a focus to this day.

However, the educational success of this program and a number of other programs mapped on similar lines, has sparked much research into why they have been so successful, not only from the point of view of their original concept, but also from the fact they seem to be making significant improvements in educational outcomes for students involved in these programs.

A number of reasons have been put forward. These include:

- Contextualisation results in the use of content with which the student has some familiarity. A number of studies of what can assist the learning process have identified the value of starting from something that is known rather than starting from the unknown or foreign position.
- The process of contextualisation espoused by School at the Center can assist with the creation of deeper understandings of the curriculum on the part of some teachers.
- And there is a range of specific benefits now being identified for the teacher as a professional - these have been labelled 'authentic pedagogy'.
- The use of local content, where the teacher has to learn about place before attempting to teach, makes the teacher more aware of local issues and histories that may give a deeper understanding of the 'baggage' a student may bring with them to the learning situation. A learning environment more tailored to individual difference can result, and again, studies consistently identify the benefits to learning of the taking into account of individual differences.
- And there are benefits stemming from a more supportive community. Supportive parents, in particular, are more likely to have children with a greater interest in learning.
- Behaviour problems tend to be lessened when students see some relevance for themselves in what they are being taught. Unfortunately, students who are not so educationally able and who generally remain in small communities after their more intellectually achieving peers have left, are often the most disruptive. A curriculum that gives them space to achieve by drawing on their local knowledge makes them more interested participants in learning situations.

It is this strong educational focus that now is appreciated as being the core of School at the Center. Community outcomes flow from the authenticity of the learning experience.

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School at the Centre
North Queensland.

Benefits of being a part of SatC

Students:

The following remarks are drawn from a report on the 1998 Wakefield Institute, an activity designed with School at the Center as its philosophic base.

Students observed that

> teachers were 'more at ease', that they brought in other people from the community, and that learning was more fun.

Student absences were reduced up to 50%. Is this because there is a greater personal investment in their learning that causes the student body as a whole to improve upon its attendance rate?

Learning became more meaningful to students. Many of these students wanted to be in school for reasons that were obvious to them. They wanted to get the job done and secondly to do a good job.

Students participated in designing what they would do... involvement in determining learning, a particular tenent of constructivist pedagogy ... contributes to internal motivation.

Students were happy. They were glad to be seen with what they produced. They were poised and eager to speak with those who walked by.

Other statements about the benefits to students are more formal in their judgements. The SatC schools in Nebraska consistently show high National Test scores, low drop out rates, low teen pregnancy rates, successful alumni, more students coming back home to raise their kids (Kroger, 1999).

Research has demonstrated the place of local culture and history ... 'this type of learning has great relevance for students' (Haas and Nachtigal, 1998; Gruchow, 1995; Orr, 1992; Berry, 1996; Theobald, 1997).

Perhaps the most important research underpinning student benefits from SatC and similar programs comes from the University of Wisconsin.

> Instruction which engages students most of the time and gets them to use their minds well is still the key to student learning. It is characterised by ... 1) higher order thinking, 2) depth of knowledge, 3) connectedness to the world beyond the classroom, 4) substantive conversation, and 5) social support for student achievement.
>
> Newmann and Wehlage, 1993

Authentic achievements - accomplishments that are significant, worthwhile and meaningful - can also bolster students of low status by identifying multiple abilities.

SatC is a way of engaging students. Engaged students want to learn.

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

Benefits of being a part of SatC

Teachers.

Teachers make SatC work.

This is also a euphemism for teachers doing more work, for teachers will find they do more work in a School at the Centre environment.

First of all there is learning about and identifying with the SatC philosophy - and this is best conveyed by reading articles about rural education and SatC and similar programs as well as getting involved.

Then there is the contextualisation process that works best when teachers have a detailed knowledge of the curriculum and of the local area - something teachers new to teaching and a rural community often find to be a big ask!

Then there is the working out of how to be involved with the local community. This creates a demand for extra effort above what would be the norm if teaching were confined to just the classroom.

And there are also the increased risks - of becoming involved in community affairs, of being responsible for kids in different environments, of balancing workloads, and working with a broader range of people.

So why be involved?

In brief, for two main reasons: for the professional development that SatC supports, and for a greater degree of personal satisfaction with teaching.

SatC can assist teachers gain a deeper familiarity with what they teach. This results in increased confidence, a feeling of being 'on top of it', and knowing where what is being taught 'fits in'.

There is the satisfaction of being part of a program that has shown it really can make a difference to kids' learning. The positive response that has been found with parents in other SatC communities helps support and motivate teachers through those low times that can afflict us all.

SatC teachers also benefit from being part of a team with a common philosophy. This networking of professionals - teachers talking to teachers - is a source of empowerment and encouragement. The outside assistance offered by SatC staff also helps with expertise and serves to limit risk-taking concerns.

Teachers also see the benefits of students becoming more engaged. This often results in a lower incidence of behavioural problems making teaching more enjoyable.

Finally, SatC is a small organisation. Small organisations are less bureaucratic than large organisations and people in small organisations interact more as a community than as a bureaucracy. SatC has the characteristics of a 'microworld' (Senge, 1992) where people can test ideas, foster critical thinking, participate in group problem solving, cast a wide search for new ideas, operate in a safe environment, and experience a liberating freedom ... (Wakefield Institute 1998).

SatC is rewarding work.

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

Benefits of being a part of SatC

Community:

Learning is making a difference in towns struggling for survival ... with youth investing in and developing a new appreciation for their communities.

I've left a part of myself here so eventually I might want to come back.

Learning has value to the community and to the families of students.

School at the Center transforms communities into working laboratories.

Youth can be powerful and enthusiastic in participating in community revitalisation when they become partners in contributing their ideas and attitudes in planning for the future.

Schools can serve to help the revitalisation or rebuilding of communities in rural areas.

Rural community revitalisation depends on visionary leaders of all ages who are empowered, united and committed to local initiatives and investments.

When schools and communities share common beliefs, student work is more meaningful.

Public education for the civic good requires healthy communities.

All these comments are about how schools can contribute to the viability and vitality of rural communities - the work of School at the Centre.

Youth being involved bring new and fresh ideas, and boundless energy when engaged. They have inquisitive and creative minds, and they can ask questions that others may feel constrained not to as - and expect to get answers'.

Being involved strengthens local social capital - the 'glue' of interactions that hold a community together. Communities that look to external resources are forever dependent on grant funds to support improvement work. This leads to negative consequences as a result of dependency as it weakens local social capital and the will to 'do it ourselves'.

Youth being involved in the community also builds inter-generational bridges, lessening age-group isolation and the potential for 'them and us' conflict.

The work of School at the Centre schools, teachers and students also encourages those characteristics within a community that have been identified as indicators of successful towns.

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Characteristics of Successful Communities

I recently came across a listing of features common to successful communities, developed by Dr. Cornelia Flora when at Kansas State University. I am not sure how old the list is, but the ideas are keepers that will stand the test of time.

Accept Controversy. Research has shown that in successful communities controversy was considered normal, it was expected. It was not treated as bad, wrong or abnormal - and neither were the people who presented it. Rather, controversy was regarded as a necessity of participatory governance.

Just the opposite was revealed in dying towns. People avoided controversy and refused to address issues. In addition, the public was antagonistic toward rules, regulations and the people who made them.

Depersonalize Politics. People in successful towns held objective views of politics. They did not side with someone out of friendship alone - neither did they oppose someone simply because that person was an educator, a business person or a farmer.

On the other hand, dying communities personalized their politics - they couldn't separate the person from the job. They gave loyalty to people rather than issues, and the good old boy clique prevailed right up to the end.

Emphasize Academics. In prosperous small towns the emphasis in schools was on academics rather than sports.

In dying towns, schools tried to hold people's interest by promoting loyalty to sports. However, when academic programs deteriorated, people moved their children to better schools.

Take Risks. In successful communities there was a willingness to risk for the good of the town. Prosperous towns had enough successes to want risk - and they had success because they did risk.

Dying towns had neither.

Tax Themselves. Successful towns had a willingness to tax themselves. They moved beyond want and desire into action.

Dying towns accurately identified needs, but that's where everything stopped. They thought someone else should pay the bill for their gain and weren't willing to tax themselves.

Open Leadership. Successful towns have the ability to expand, they made space for more people – including those who were new to the community.

This was not true in dying towns, where townspeople would not share their power and authority with new comers, and a small group held all leadership positions.

Receptive. Successful towns also have the ability to network vertically as well as horizontally.

By contrast, learning in dying towns was all lateral. The citizens didn't want to learn from anyone who wasn't exactly like themselves.

Flexible. Successful towns were flexible. They disbursed community leadership with many people involved in the work and mission of the community.

In dying communities, a small clique of people controlled all the decision-making processes.

From Cal Clark *101 More Ideas on Economic Development.*

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School at the Centre
North Queensland.

P O Box 44
Herberton
4887

Dear

Introducing SatC

You most likely have heard by now (following the Priority Country Area Program meeting in Cairns last week) of the *School at the Centre Pilot Project*.

This project (SatC is the acronym), based on a similar program in rural Nebraska, looks at ways that the curriculum can be contextualised to place - in this case, specifically to rural places. From this contextualisation process, opportunities can be identified where a school can make positive direct contributions to the community in which that school is situated.

There are major parallels between SatC and the new curriculum materials being introduced into Queensland Schools.

Origins of SatC in North Queensland

James Cook University through the Rural Education Research and Development Centre has worked in the field of rural education for many years and recently received assistance from the Federal government to pilot the School at the Center ideas in a small number of PCAP schools in North Queensland. This pilot program is presently being implemented.

This letter is to ask if your school would be interested in joining in the preliminary information dissemination stage of the pilot program and more specifically if you would like a visit from the Director of the Nebraskan School at the Center Program. Jerry Hoffman, the Director of SatC Nebraska will be in Australia for most of the month of May.

There would be no cost or expectations for your school, just the chance for you, your staff and if it could be arranged, some of your community, to meet the Director and find out more of the SatC program.

I include some information in a brochure satchel for your perusal.

Could you please advise your interest in Jerry's visit? I will then fit that visit into Jerry's itinerary and advise you of the date(s).

Yours faithfully

Ivan Searston
Project Director
School at the Centre Pilot Project
North Queensland
2nd April 2001

Return contact
Above address, OR email satc@jcu.edu.au , OR Phone 4096 2304 , OR Fax 4096 2343

School at the Centre
North Queensland.

SatC Update - 9th April, 2001:

1. PCAP briefing:

The area PCAP meeting held in Cairns on Wednesday 21st March was briefed on the School at the Centre Pilot Proposal in North Queensland. Members were comfortable with the proposal and the implementation program outlined and interest in being a part of the pilot was expressed by a number of those who were in attendance.

Frank Sims has assisted SatC in providing some information to schools during visits when he is on PCAP business.

2. Invitation to have Jerry Hoffman visit your school:

By now you would have received your School at the Centre Information Packs and the letter seeking your interest in meeting with Jerry Hoffman, the Director of the School at the Center Program in Nebraska. I have been overwhelmed by responses so far - not a single negative.

If you have not indicated your interest in Jerry visiting your school to speak with Admin/teachers/community (you nominate the extent of the contact) to speak about SatC, could you please do so as soon as convenient?

3. Visit to Nebraska:

One of the activities that was funded under the Pilot Program was a visit to Nebraska to gain first-hand knowledge of the projects that SatC was involved in over there.

This visit begins on the 20th April, with a return date of 7th May. Jerry follows us back to Australia for his visit beginning 13th May. (This is the main reason for ensuring all interested schools are on his list ASAP).

Purpose of the visit to Nebraska is to assemble a compendium of the activities that SatC is involved in and to meet face-to-face with people who might act as resources for teachers and schools implementing SatC over here.

4. A website to look at:

The SatC information pack gives the background to the SatC program. If you would like to see what one school in Nebraska is doing in conjunction with SatC, have a look at the Albion Public School website. People who are familiar with PCAP would be at home with these projects.

http://albion.esu7.org/S@C/project/home.html

Kind Regards.

Ivan Searston, Project Director
SatC North Queensland.

Snowfall almost disrupts school visits in Nebraska. Photo shows hire car buried in snow

Possible itinerary Nebraskan visit:
Trip begins Friday 20th April 2001. - JCU has organised tickets.

Friday 20th	1. Drive Cairns to arrive before 4.30 am 2. Qantas 50 international to Sydney. Departs 5.30 to arrive Sydney 8.20am. 3. Transfer to Sydney international during 4½ hour stopover 4. Qantas QF11 leaves Sydney 1.55pm to arrive Los Angeles 10.25am 5. Stopover time of 4 hours to clear customs and reach United domestic terminal 6. United flight leaves LAX 2.55 arrive Denver 6.00pm 7. United Airlines flight operated by Great Lakes Airlines leaves Denver 9.10pm to arrive Scottsbluff 10.02pm. 8. Overnight stay in Scottsbluff	Sydney changeover time is OK LAX changeover time is OK Denver changeover time is OK
Saturday 21st	1. Pick up hire car (say by 11.00am) and drive to Chadron. 2. Scottsbluff-Chadron 140 miles = 3 hours 3. Overnight at Chadron or closer to South Dakota. 4. Chadron-Crazy Horse 80 miles = 2 hours 5. Return Chadron approximately 7.00pm 6. Overnight in Chadron - has Super 8.	Hire car costs $40/day US plus insurance. Need 3 days.
Monday 23rd	1. Visit with Chadron College, Center for Small Schools, Mari Sandoz Center project 8.00am to 4.00pm 2. Stay overnight in Chadron	
Tuesday 24th	1. 8.30 to 11.30 drive back to Scottsbluff 140 miles = 3 hours and return hire car 2. Meet Chuck and visit Panhandle Development Center and Scottsbluff CHDO 3. Stay in Scottsbluff overnight	Do this on own - contact details from Jerry.
Wednesday 25th	1. Drive to Morrill 20 miles = ½ hour. Arrive 11.00am 2. Visit at Morrill 11.00 to 4.30pm 3. Drive to Potter 85 miles=2 hours, arrive at Potter by 7.00pm 4. Stay overnight at Potter (or Kimball 20 miles to west of Potter - has Super 8)	Assumes Chuck supplies transport Wednesday to Saturday (Scottsbluff, Morrill, Potter, Arthur, Tryon, North Platte.) Check with Jerry
Thursday 26th	1. 8.00 to 2.00 visit at Potter 2. Drive to Arthur 140 miles=3 hours, arrive in Arthur by 6.30 (time for Ogallala) 3. Stay overnight in Arthur (or at Ogallala 40 miles south of Arthur- has a Super 8)	
Friday 27th	1. Visit with Arthur 9.00 to 11.30 2. Drive toTryon 40 miles+ 1 hour to arrive by 1.00pm. 3. Visit with Tryon 1.00 to 5.00pm Stay overnight at Tryon (or go on to North Platte for accommodation 40 miles = 1 hour away)	
Saturday 28th	1. Drive to North Platte 9.00am, 40 miles= 1 hour to arrive 10.00am (unless completed on night before) 2. Say goodbye to Chuck 3. Stay overnight at North Platte or in Lincoln depending on meeting arrangement with Jerry.	Jerry indicates he would most likely meet us at North Platte.

Sunday 29th	1. Rest day - see the Haymarket 2. Maybe meet with Jerry and his family for a meal on Sunday? 3. Overnight stay in Lincoln	Jerry confirms family dinner on Sunday night
Monday 30th	1. Jerry's organisation - Albion and Ord 2. Overnight stay in Ord. Jerry will fix.	
Tuesday 1st May	1. Jerry's organisation - Walthill - Center for Rural Affairs and - Omaha Indian Nation Public Schools 2. Overnight stay	
Wednesday 2nd	1. Jerry's organisation - Crete Public Schools - Blue Valley Family Resource Center - School-based business etc 2. Overnight stay	
Thursday 3rd	1. Jerry's organisation - University. John Allen. Humanities Center 2. Overnight stay	
Friday 4th	1. Jerry's organisation - Teachers College lunch. Chancellor's meeting. 2. Overnight stay in Lincoln	
Saturday 5th	1. Fly ex Lincoln to Denver United flight 1275 Leaves Lincoln 1.25pm and arrives Denver 1.49pm. 2. Denver to Los Angeles United flight 1215 leaves Denver 4.45pm to arrive Los Angeles 6.11pm. 3. Stopover in Los Angeles 4. Board Qantas 012 at 10.30pm bound for Sydney to arrive 6.10am Monday 7th	2¼ hours transfer time within same domestic terminal DEN. 4 hour stopover time to transfer from domestic to international and complete exit requirements LAX.
Sunday 6th	Day lost by dateline cross	
Monday 7th	1. Arrive Sydney 6.10am 2. Clear customs and transfer to domestic terminal' Gives 5½ hours to clear customs if 770 is used. (There are earlier flights, for example 710 at 8.45am.) 3. Qantas flight 770 leaves Sydney 11.30am to arrive Cairns 2.30pm.	From 2½ to 5½ hours to clear customs depending on which flight to Cairns.

18 days away

15 days with overnight stays in Nebraska. (Super 8 motels exist in Chadron, Scottsbluff, Kimball, Ogallala and North Platte - about $90 AUD).

3 days car hire (Scottsbluff - Chadron - Scottsbluff)

3 overnights spent on international flights.

Performance and Reporting Contract:

Between

Mr David Prete, Northern Priority Country Area Program, School at the Centre Pilot Project North Queensland and Education Queensland

regarding

Visit to School at the Center, Nebraska to study the School at the Center program and its implementation in a number of schools across Nebraska. The visit will also involve discussions and presentations to faculty and others at the Office of Rural Affairs, Chadron Teachers College and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

Purpose of visit

1. To assess the administrative support requirements in place in schools that are involved in the School at the Center Program in Nebraska and evaluate the transferability of these administrative arrangements to the schools involved in the School at the Centre Pilot Project in North Queensland.
2. To gain first hand knowledge of the School at the Center Program in schools in Nebraska so as to act as a knowledgeable resource within Education Queensland to link together administrative requirements of Education Queensland with the support for School at the Centre Pilot Project in Australia.

Itinerary

The planned itinerary is attached. The visit will take place from 20th April to the 7th May 2001 inclusive of travel.

Reporting requirements

A diary will be maintained for the whole of the Nebraskan visit.

A detailed report on the overall visit will be made available to the stakeholders listed in this contract. The report will cover

The actual itinerary as it occurred;
Lists of contacts made;
Summary of administrative arrangements at schools visited;
Evaluation of transferability to the Queensland pilot schools;
Summary of the various activities that School at the Center schools were involved in;
Additional comment (as appropriate) on other transferability issues.

In addition, input will be required into the completion of the Department of Transport and Regional Services contract requirements for the acquital of the Nebraskan visit activities, namely:

> *to produce a portfolio of examples including photographs, pamphlets, and other relevant documentation, individual contacts at schools (including URLs) and the development of mentor lists for Australian teachers and community members involved in the implementation of the School at the Centre Pilot Project in North Queensland.*
> *And to document visions, goals, outcomes and philosophical statements to be generated in conjunction with U.S. personnel*
> *And to create a number of 'action templates' that could be used by teachers wishing to implement School at the Center activities into the pilot schools in North Queensland.*

Timelines

The personal report will be completed by June 30th 2001 and be made available to the parties listed in this contract at that date.

Contributions to the reporting requirements of the Department of Transport and Regional Services portfolio will be completed by July 31st 2001.

A separate acquittal is required under the Northern Priority Country Area Program guidelines.

2nd April, 2001

X-From_: jh50022@alltel.net Fri Mar 16 14:26:27 2001
From: "Jerry L. Hoffman" <jh50022@alltel.net>
To: "'Ivan & Mary Searston'" <searston@tpg.com.au>
Subject: RE: satc benefits
Date: Thu, 15 Mar 2001 21:28:47 -0600
X-MSMail-Priority: Normal
X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook CWS, Build 9.0.2416 (9.0.2910.0)
X-MimeOLE: Produced By Microsoft MimeOLE V5.00.2314.1300
Importance: Normal
X-MIME-Autoconverted: from 8bit to quoted-printable by kryton.tpgi.com.au id OAA03065
X-MIME-Autoconverted: from quoted-printable to 8bit by buffy.tpgi.com.au id OAA07264

Ivan,

I have cut-and-paste some material I use to describe such benefits, and what should be "in-place" to encourage these benefits. I hope this is helpful.

Jerry

Key Ideas Supporting School at the Center
I. Localized Curriculum and Staff Development
* Don't prescribe to teachers -- allow them to innovate.
Intellectual capital is a critical resource to teachers for curriculum development.
Do not impose a prescribed curriculum that teachers just emulate.
legitimizes teacher innovation.
Community-relevant curricular projects require will, not money; it requires a change in habit.
Teachers must have an easily accessible support network.

* Networking is a pathway to community ownership.
Connect teachers with community development professionals and state agencies for the purpose of creating a curriculum of place.
Connection buys "good will" between the trilogy of community development organizations (e.g., the Niehardt Center in Northeast Nebraska), teachers, and state agencies (e.g., the Nebraska Humanities Council).
Sharing information, technical assistance, and other non-monetary resources is a capacity building activity with roots in the local community.
Connection opens the intellectual horizon of teachers, whom see their role as a teacher differently. This increases curriculum innovation opportunities in a local context, and ensures that the value of student work is beyond the walls of the school.
Networking helps to renew a sense of community-school relationship that is otherwise at the verge of erosion because of political and financial pressures forcing a wedge in this relationship.

* Students learn most when they have responsibility for real problems in their surroundings.
Miles Bryant makes a statement in a May 1998 report entitled "Curriculum Invention in Rural Places" that captures the relevance of student learning. The story comes from Suzanne Ratzlaff's fourth grade students in Henderson, Nebraska. Miles writes:
"The students studied the early history of their community, they wrote a play based on that history, and they performed their play before a large audience of community members [estimated at 600]. The play was about the Schoolhouse or Children's Blizzard of 1888, a terrible and unexpected storm that killed many people...In this curriculum invention, students learned about ancestors, life on the Great Plains, telephone rubbering, raising silkworms, immigration, family trees, Mennonite heritage, conducting historical research, locating data from various historical society web-sites, reading town property records, writing, projecting their voices loudly to an audience, compromising, tracking down solutions to historical riddles, writing concisely and correctly for an external audience of people, and about writing poetry and songs.

While this passage references the work of fourth grade students, it describes a quality of work that is expressing a sophisticated understanding of self and of place, which moves across disciplines and between grade levels. Embedded in curricular work across most of the schools is a strong sense of pride, humbleness, knowledge about their local community and its relation to the larger world around it, and connectivity to the surrounding ecology (human-nature).

II. Networking
Its broad purpose is to create, sustain, and deepen a collective understanding of: (1) ways to construct community schools that serve the community and are seen as assets to local development efforts; (2) the role of contextual learning in rural development; (3) the importance of giving children and youth authentic responsibility in the community; and (4) the

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responsibility the community has to strengthen its local education system as an instrument of cultural, socio-economic, and ecological development.
* It is another form of barn-raising.
it involves the use of skills, knowledge, and techniques or tools between persons for the purpose of community development.
Relationships are not based on status: people in communities and school districts help out each other to solve issues rooted in a local setting or situation. Relationships are strengthened by removing the artificial barrier of professionalism.

* Introducing the virtual café.
Another key strength of a network is that it creates an environment for both formal facilitated dialogue, and informal conversation regarding community-based teaching and learning, and ways of using the rural school as an agent in community improvement. It's important to have these conversations grounded to particular themes, and provide text and other forms of material to aid the discussion. This lesson comes from the regional community/school cluster meetings conducted quarterly, with each community taking its turn as host site. We did not do this consistently throughout the year, and tended to have the discussion be about curricular projects. The discussions tended to not elevate to more sophisticated public engagement regarding rural community schooling. A stronger emphasis next year will be placed on grounding the discussion in each cluster in various writings as a means of steering people to discuss the underlying, philosophical purpose to this work.
* City-State vs. Nation-State: A final lesson is about the importance of linking people and resources locally with those available in a region and at the state-level. It's important to first begin at the local level in a way that people identify what resources are immediately available to support their community-based projects. Sustainability begins at home where the inhabitants exercise their collective will and social capital to implement and sustain community and school improvement efforts, rather than identifying where financial resources are located external to the community. Communities and school districts which first look for external resources are forever dependent upon grant funds to support their improvement work. They tend, also, to suffer long-term negative consequences as a result of this dependency because it weakens local social capital. We see this in the way some school districts approach the School at the Center Project solely for funding. When we encourage a school district or community to first connect local issues and projects with local resources it is met with disappointment. We recognize that many rural communities in Nebraska may be in financial poverty, but have a surplus of social or civic capital.
Morrill is an example of this lesson. It is an agriculture community of 1,100 residents located ten miles east of the Wyoming border, and fifteen miles northwest of Scottsbluff. The majority of community projects are supported with local resources – private financial resources and/or "sweat equity". This community believes that it can pull itself up by the boot-straps, which is best revealed in their work with housing development for young families and the elderly.
A network which is based on this city-state framework prevents communities and school districts from becoming independent islands in the sea of prairie land because there is sharing among each other about the different types of local resources which can be used in community projects. It is this type of discussion that we need to place greater emphasis on in the upcoming years.

A. Leadership and Community Capacity Building
Capacity building is a frequently used contemporary jargon that suffers from a lack of common understanding. It means something different among community development and education professionals, and almost nothing to the general public. What we refer to as "capacity building" is basically rural people acquiring skills, creating knowledge, and applying their understanding of balance between how to help themselves and when to ask for help. It, again, requires that people first search within themselves (the community) before reaching out. The three legs of this stool include (1) being responsible for each other and individual actions (communal reciprocity); (2) paying "public rent" for inhabiting a place to support necessary public goods (resource redistribution); and (3) understanding how individual dreams, hopes, and expectations translate to improved socio-economic, cultural, and environmental conditions for the unborn generations (exchange). These elements underscore the important relationship between the institution of schooling, community or the "public", and family and place these relationships in the context of serviceability to community.

An important lesson we have learned is that for the renewal of rural communities and a system of community schools to flourish it is a prerequisite that the local school board, the entire teaching faculty and administration, and the youth and their parents are exposed to community leadership skills. Similarly, members of the "public" and

community/economic development professionals need to have exposure to a set of skills whereby the institution of schooling is used as a public asset to community vitality. That is, where board members, teachers, administrators, and youth are participants in both school and community decision making vis-a-vis their local polity.

This lesson is born out of the consensus building and alternative dispute resolution work in both the community of Albion and the Albion Public School. The public and community/economic development professionals participated in a three-day workshop on consensus building skills, which was initiated from school administration. Every teacher and administrator in Albion Public Schools went through a three-day in-service on alternative dispute resolution skills in the context of staff development. Presently, twelve Albion elementary and high school students are being trained in community consensus building, facilitation, and conflict resolution skills and processes. The curriculum has been developed by Ellen Kohtz, 6th grade teacher, and Deb Brownyard, executive director of the Nebraska Justice Center, who provides the intensive training. The purpose is to develop Albion youth and community consensus-building teams which will be actively engaged in planning and facilitating public dialogues and decision-making processes. The planned activities include facilitating public policy and community issues; and specifically, the design and programming of the Albion Youth Center. This is a leadership and community capacity building effort we would like to see adapted to other places. It's not taking place in more of our partner community-school sites, and will be emphasized next year.

B. Advocacy, Organizing, and State Policy

In all honesty, we learned more by getting our feet wet in the area of public policy than by having any serious effect on legislation. We put the cart before the horse by trying to directly develop policy for a short-term legislative audience, and failed. We failed because our grassroots organizing effort was with a limited constituency. And, quite frankly, the School at the Center Project at present time doesn't carry much credibility in public policy circles because we have not communicated the purpose of our efforts with a larger audience. If we could point to any achievement it is that the four policy conferences served as a starting point for organizing a rural constituency around education policy. In total, there were 225 participants from across the state (including 25 youth). Of that amount, probably 25 to 30 people can be considered committed activists over the long-term. Our lessons speak to the need for investing energy into front-end capacity building by working directly with local school boards, unifying and strengthening key Nebraska rural advocacy groups, and on public engagement. Upon reflection on our work, two important lessons emerge and frame the agenda for our work in the next two to four years that includes policy advocacy and grassroots organizing.

* Advocacy: Among the 225 people who participated in the policy conferences (which included bankers, farmers and ranchers, school administrators, teachers, parents, school board members, small business owners and employees, high school students, and ministers) few understood how public policy is made, ways of organizing around policy solutions, and what they can do to effect policy making. We see local school boards which have little understanding about how to make school policy, and tend to follow an administrators lead. There is fragmentation of rural interests into factional groups organized by specific interest such as Class I's United for K-6 school districts, or an organization of teachers in small, rural schools. Finally, state-wide education associations seem too weak to effectively advocate on behalf of rural schools and the rural people for whom they serve, and by whom they're supported.

We think it is important, in light of this brief assessment, to develop partnerships with key Nebraska rural advocacy groups, pool resources, and develop an advocacy training/education effort. This effort will target local school boards and rural activists for the purpose of both unifying and strengthening individual groups for collective action. For example, the content of this effort would focus on analysis of present day state and local education policy issues, activist organizing methods, and mobilization of rural people.

* Grassroots Organizing: To be an effective advocate requires extensive organizing of people and groups in rural places. Where the advocacy training focuses on a core group of activists or "social entrepreneurs", it is conducted within the larger context of grassroots organizing. This organizing is for the purpose of creating a rural social movement around rural community and education issues, including the social and educational virtues of smallness. In other words, working to create opportunities for rural people to participate in democratic mobilization around issues that effect their lives such as education, poverty, housing, and health care. For us to take responsibility for this assessment requires that we create new and sustain existing partnerships with community-based groups and rural people. The labor-intensity of this work demands that we hire a person to engage in state-wide organizing work, to coincide with the advocacy training

Printed for Ivan & Mary Searston <searston@tpg.com.au>

agenda.

C. Documentation and Public Communication
Nebraska is in the thick of a national social movement around standards, assessment, and accountability. The Governor has been critical of the Nebraska State Board of Education because our state is one of two that have not adopted standards. Yet, the educational achievement of Nebraska students rank in the top five or ten depending on what is being measured, with rural students achieving higher than their non-rural peers. For example, Nebraska 8th graders ranked seventh in the nation for scoring at or above basic level on the 1996 NAEP math exam. In the state, eighty percent of rural students and sixty-five percent of urban students scored at or above the basic level. We know from national scholarly work that students in small, rural school districts and resource poor communities achieve at the same level or higher compared to urban students. Also, we understand from national research the inherent bias of test scores based predominantly on race, gender, and socio-economic status (holding school district size equal).
We think the standards movement is one of centricity, and can do serious harm to the kind of work or curricular movement we seek to create in Nebraska. State standards are likely to result in curriculum mediocrity which comes from a process that seeks to regress all to a mean, and moves the focus of learning further away from community. Philosophically, School at the Center focuses on divergence, not convergence, which is evidenced in our lack of curricular prescription to teachers. Our lesson is that we must do a better job of documenting student learning of place, teaching to place, and the relationship of schooling to community vitality. Further, we must use a variety of media to document this work and to communicate its substance to a broader public audience. It requires us to identify or characterize the qualities of student performance in rural community schools where the curricula is localized, and to submit for public discussion these qualities as local standards relevant to the notions of a more integrated global society. If we cannot do this, then we will have fallen short of our own expectations.

D. Pre-service Teacher and Administrator Education
We believe that an essential role of the university and state college system is to work in partnership with rural communities and schools. These state institutions must have a social mission of outreach that helps rural people help themselves in the continuous construction of community vitality. The long-term agenda for rural community development and systemic reform of rural education requires the creation of a community-school-university partnership.
Our work in this area is just beginning. What we are learning is that to move the School at the Center Project toward a more systemic initiative means we must develop undergraduate and graduate course work in the field of rural education and community development. This course work would be offered, at a minimum, to students in the disciplines of sociology, teaching, and educational administration. We need to create student teacher practicum experiences in small, rural schools. Efforts must be explored to recruit graduates of rural high schools into the area of rural teaching and school administration, which could be available through a scholarship program. Finally, the university and state college system needs to reevaluate its mission and objectives to ensure an emphasis on service for community capacity building in Nebraska.

Jerry's Itinerary - School visits

WEEK 1.

	Sunday 13 May	Monday 14	Tuesday 15	Wednesday 16	Thursday 17	Friday 18	Saturday 19
Early am		6 00 am drive Cooktown Meet Catherine 8 30 Mt Molloy	Drive to Rossville	7 00am drive Julatten	7 30am Drive to Ibank Meet Debbie		
Morning		12 00 arrive Cooktown school (and after school) *Principal with Community reps meeting*	Rossville principal and staff *Principal meeting*	meet with Jenny and staff/parents *Principal meeting P&C meeting.*	Meet Irvinebank principal/parents/ staff *Principal meeting. Student meeting. Staff meeting Parents meeting.*	9.00 more Herberton Council meeting Intro Jerry 10.00am *Community meeting.*	9 00 P&C Conference Ravenshoe *Parent workshop. Individual meetings.* 12 00 District tourism meeting *Community meeting.*
Afternoon	Plane arrives Cairns	More Cooktown *Whole staff workshop. Individual discussions.*	1 00 Meet with Lakeland staff/parents *Principal and students meeting. Principal and P&C meeting*	Drive Mt Molloy meet with Mal and staff *Principal meeting.*	12.00 drive to Herberton meet with staff /parents *Principal/senior staff meeting. Staff and community workshop*	1.30 Cairns Post *Community information.* 2.00 District Office. *Senior EQ officer meeting.*	2 30 return to parent conference *Individual parent meetings.* 6 00 David Prete/Mark Aitken (Herberton school) dinner *Principal and senior staff meeting.*
Evening	Herberton rest overnight **Acc: HerbertonXX**	Invitation dinner Cooktown staff/parents *Community meeting* **Acc: Cooktown$$**	Dinner with principal *Principal meeting* **Acc: Lakeland$$**	5 00pm drive back to Herberton **Acc: HerbertonXX**	**Acc: HerbertonXX**	**Acc: HerbertonXX**	**Acc: HerbertonXX**

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WEEK 2.

	Sunday 20	Monday 21	Tuesday 22	Wednesday 23	Thursday 24	Friday 25	Saturday 26
Early am			7.30 Drive Ravenswood	6.00am drive Collinsville			
Morning	12.00am drive to Charters Towers via the Lynd	9.00 Meet Sandra at Alliance of Ch Trs State Schools. *Principal meeting.* 10.00 Meet with Alliance Board *Principals workshop* 12.30 Lunch with Board	9.00 Meet Ravenswood *Principals meeting*	9.30am meet Leigh at CollSHS for round table with local schools (all principals) *Principals meeting + EQ ADD* 11.00 Scottsville *Principals meeting. Students meeting.*	8.30 Meet Collinsville PS *Principals meeting* 10.30 St John Bosco (as arranged from Wednesday) *Principals meeting. Staff meeting.*	9.00 Drive Mingela *Principals meeting.* Return Townsville 11.30 Meet with CEO Cath Ed Tville *Senior education meeting.*	8.00 Drive back to Herberton
Afternoon	Arrive Charters Towers 6.00pm	1.30 SoDE *Principals meeting. Staff meeting.* 4.00 Blackheath/ Thornburgh *Principals meeting*	Drive Townsville JCU meeting 1.30 with Dean of School of Educ. *Senior education meeting.* ABC studio 3.15 National interview. *Community information.*	After school meeting CSHS 3.10 teachers *Staff workshop* 7.30 meeting with community reps and principals *Community meeting.*	Drive Townsville 7.00 David McSwan *Senior education meeting.*	12.30 JCU luncheon with faculty *Senior education meeting.* 3.00 ABC studio for Townsville interview. *Community information.*	7.00 Meet with College of Rural Practice/ Wilderness Expeditions *Community meeting.*
Evening	**Acc: Ch Trs $$**	**Acc: Ch Trs $$**	**Acc: Townsville $$**	**Acc: Collinsville$$**	**Acc: Townsville $$**	**Acc: Townsville $$**	**Acc: HerbertonXX**

110

Cattlemans Rest Motel booked Sunday and Monday 20th and 21st 47873555.

116 Shoredrive Motel booked at Townsville Tuesday night 23rd 47716851

Opal Ridge Motel in Collinsville 24th

Shoredrive Motel booked at Townsville Thursday and Friday 25th and 26th

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WEEK 3.

	Sunday 27	Monday 28	Tuesday 29	Wednesday 30	Thursday 31	Friday 1 June	Saturday 2
Early am		Drive Cairns	8.00 drive Babinda				5.30am fly out of Cairns
Morning	Debrief and write notes	District Office PCAP *Senior educ meeting*	9.30 Babinda with principal and DD (Barry Staib) *Principals meeting* *Senior EQ meeting* 10.30 Student reps *Student meeting*	Debrief 11.30 ABC Cairns	Debrief 10.30 Lady Pearl Logan *Senior community meeting*	Homestead Voc Ed workshop 8.30 *Staff and community meeting*	
Afternoon	1.00 Visit Wetlands (compare Olsen Nature Park) *Community meeting*	Debrief	1.00 Whole staff *Staff workshop* *Senior BSSSS meeting* 2.00 Guided tour by student reps. *Student meeting*	3.00 Atherton High School *Principals meeting.*	12.30 Herberton school *Individual staff meetings*	2.30 Drive to Cairns	Arrive Lincoln pm
Evening	**Acc: HerbertonXX**	**Acc: Cairns $$**	**Acc: HerbertonXX**	**Acc: HerbertonXX**	**Acc: HerbertonXX**	**Acc: Cairns$$**	

Acacia Court booked Monday 28th and Friday 1st June

Totals 6 workshops - 5 are shaded - Cooktown (10 attendees), Tablelands (25 attendees), Charters Towers (11 attendees); Collinsville (23 attendees); Coastal (25 attendees). Sixth is the parent conference 19-20th May (~50 attendees) Two other workshops with JCU students will be held later in the year (without SatC Nebraska presence but more at the end of school planning sessions so student teachers can see the process)

Grant application suggested 8 workshops plus work with individual school personnel (principals, individual staff members, community members) so the planned schedule is covered.

Workshops – 6
Principals meetings – 23
Staff meetings other than workshops – not counted
Meetings involving Community – 13
Student meetings – 4
Meetings involving senior educationists other than school based – 7
Media coverage – 5 Qld Country Life, Cairns Post, ABC Bush Telegraph (National), ABC Regional Townsville, ABC Regional Cairns.

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Positive Rural Futures Address May 2001.

To use a neat expression from one of the people I met with last week in Nebraska, I would like to invite you to come walk down a couple of trails with me.

The first trail is about the future of Community Development.

Last year I received a hand-made Christmas card from a work colleague. The card showed an old man walking along a beach, slowly and carefully picking up jellyfish stranded on the beach by the ebbing tide. He was returning them to the water. A number of passers-by commented on the futility of his activity - there were too many for his efforts to make a difference, the tide would inexorably undo his work ... But the old man replied, 'Ah, yes. But it makes a difference to this one.'

This card awoke a pessimistic train of thought in my mind. Is this what we are indeed doing in community development? Responding to individual situations and justifying our actions by the warm glow we feel by making one small difference?

This card underlined an increasing concern of mine - that what we are doing in community development, community capacity building, call it what you will, is almost exclusively reactive in nature. It is a response to perceived crises, and is treated as an answer for just that moment.

I am not saying we should stop what we are doing, for with the parlous state of many of our rural communities, that would be the last thing to do. Every little piece of assistance counts. What I am saying is that we must also include a more pro-active component in working with rural communities and move deeper into what is community capacity and where it is generated.

And I would now like to turn off into a new trail that links schools to community capacity building.

My educator background predisposes me to believe that we need to take our community building message into schools and the people who will form the communities of the future. Otherwise, we run the risk of community development and capacity building forever being a reactive, repetitive activity that works with adults who have never had the chance to develop community building skills as part of their earlier education.

Schools have always had a role in educating young people for a place in the future. This is part of providing a quality education. But as noted educationist John Sergiovanni (1999) says:

> 'Though most principals, superintendents, and teachers have a desire to do better and are working as hard as they can to provide a quality education to every student they serve, the road is rough and the going is slow.
> The lead villain in this frustrating drama is the loss of community in our schools and in society itself.'

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Compounding this, the growing concentration on generic skills, trying to cope within a curriculum with the massive growth in human knowledge, and a rhetoric that worships the large picture - globalisation, at the expense of the local - education, I believe, has become the captive of society, not the builder of community.

> Educators and reformers often worry that today's students spend too much of their time simply absorbing - and then reproducing - information transmitted to them. Students can earn credits, good grades and high test scores, they say, demonstrating a kind of mastery that frequently seems trivial, contrived or meaningless outside the school.
>
> Newmann et al, 1995

This is very evident in the attention, or lack thereof, paid to *The Rural* in our schools and what is taught there.

The message in rural schooling

Too often, schooling in rural areas promulgates a message very denigrating of the rural and rural people.

> the implicit message sent through curriculum, school structure and location, and administrative protocols [is] that rural communities and their values, skills, and knowledge are backward and substandard, places and ideas to be left behind. Increasingly curriculum has been abstracted and generalised, directed more towards colleges and corporations ...
>
> PACERS, 1994

The language often implies no future for kids in the country. Get educated and get out. A Leaving Certificate takes on a whole new meaning doesn't it? And if these young people are never to return, what else can happen other than a vicious downward spiral?

> In many rural communities, schools have become the vehicles for educating people to leave, fulfilling the prophecy that these places are doomed to poverty, decline, and despair.
>
> Nachtigal, 1998

Yet there is increasing evidence that *place* - where students live and the understandings that have been built up by experience - has great importance to successful learning.

A Different Viewpoint

More recently, increasing attention is being paid to schooling in rural areas - *rural place*. Part of this attention stems from a growing concern about the future of rural places and rural communities - a community development concern - and partly from concerns over equity - rural schools must receive fair consideration in the provision of education.

This increasing attention has resulted in a number of initiatives directed at improving schooling in rural areas. Unfortunately, too many of these initiatives are not seated deeply within the curriculum. They tend to be sporadic in nature, seem like good ideas at the time, are often isolated projects, 'add-ons', designed by someone wishing to 'make a difference'. The jellyfish approach. And unfortunately, to compound the problem, these approaches are often exclusionist in nature and targeted at the most able students - the ones more likely to leave!

But there are initiatives that move beyond sporadic isolated projects - approaches that seriously consider the curriculum and learning outcomes in their design. Some examples from elsewhere include Foxfire, PACERS, REAL, and the one I am involved in - School at the Center.

Down the trail to School at the Center

SatC owes much of its origins to the Office of Rural Affairs in Walthill Nebraska where I was just last week. Originally, SatC was conceived as a program that had a strong focus on schools having a responsibility for community development in the rural communities in which they were sited.

School at the Center developed around two key concepts. The first key concept was to encourage the inclusion of studies about place - rural place - into the curriculum using the key areas (termed *seeds* - after all it is the Nebraskan corn belt) of *Our Own Earth, Our Civil Good, Our Heritage* and *Our Economy*.

The incorporation of studies about place also made it easy to identify opportunities where the school, as part of the learning process, could make a contribution to the development of the home community. This contribution - *gift to the community* as one teacher has described it - is the second key concept of the School at the Center program.

Said that way, it's a very short trail we're following - contextualisation to community, and contributing to community.

While the original intention was for schools to have a community development role in their local community, over time, participating teachers and schools became aware that this approach made important contributions to enhancing learning outcomes of students.

Something bigger was going on and research at the University of Wisconsin gave some telling insights into explaining why SatC and similar programs had such remarkable effects on education. Part of the explanation lay in a combination of the **authenticity of the learning experience** and the attention paid to achieving meaningful learning outcomes from the activities.

So while School at the Center was originally conceived with a community development role, it turned out that grounding the educational process *in place* and the enhanced learning outcomes this generated meant that community development was not, in fact, the reason for the program. Rather, community development turned out to be a natural result of this reality based educational process.

It was this realisation that attracted the Rural Education Research and Development Centre at James Cook University to consider trialing SatC in North Queensland in partnership with communities involved in the Priority Country Area Program.

This is a pilot that is just beginning - I pick up Jerry Hoffman, the Director of SatC Nebraska and whom some of you would have met at the Positive Rural Future Conference in Goondiwindi in 1999, at Cairns airport tomorrow afternoon. He and I will spend the next three weeks visiting potential pilot schools across North Queensland.

Therefore, I cannot report to you on the success or otherwise of the SatC pilot in North Queensland at this point in time - perhaps next year.

Instead can I share my recent trail across Nebraska with you?

I have just returned from Nebraska where I visited a number of Nebraskan *School at the Center* schools to see first-hand what they are doing.

But first a little story.

We arrived (David and I - David was from EQ) late on Friday night the 20th April and next morning set off with a hire car to go to Chadron some 90 miles to the north. As we had a day to spare we decided to see the Black Hills enroute - about another 40 miles.

It was a bright sunny day when we left Scottsbluff but by the time we got to Deadwood it was snowing. We decided to stay at Hill City and complete the drive in daylight on the Sunday via Mt Rushmore and Crazy Horse.

However, next morning we were greeted with twenty inches of snow on the ground. The car was just a big round white blob.

We must have looked so helpless that soon we had help from the snow plow operators. They extracted the car, gave us some advice and away we went in their wake. We decided not to risk any stops and made straight for Chadron where we arrived later that day.

After making a few phone calls to tell people we had arrived, we were told we had driven through blizzard conditions! Well, it was a bit hard going - but Aussies can make it even if it was our first ever snow.

We went on to visit schools large and small. Schools where kids were doing amazing things. Like building houses as part of their studies, of being responsible for school maintenance, of linking classrooms through interactive video, of building school buildings, to being involved in creating town assets, to founding their own credit union, to promoting tourism, to starting a grocery store. The list seemed endless.

Of particular interest was the response of local people - the support for the grocery shop and the credit union, the donation of land at the Olsen Nature Park. The community responded positively and reciprocally to the school initiatives.

And these were not one-of projects. For example, the house that was being built at Hay Springs was the third such structure for that school. The activities were bedded

into the curriculum, often with the assistance of a curriculum writer who is employed by SatC to assist schools with the process.

What did we learn?
Is the School at the Center process transferable to our rural schools?

The brief answer is yes, but with qualifications.

Rural schools in Australia face a number of issues in common with rural schools in America. Declining towns, attraction to the cities, rural poverty, funding constraints, imposed 'standards'. Given the similarities, the positive things that work in Nebraskan rural schools should also work over here.

But the qualifications are telling. We have a lesser sense of community - we are far less self-reliant at the community level. We tend to look for the nebulous 'THEY' to address our needs.

And we have far less access to private money for altruistic activities - something that School at the Center depends on. Americans have a tradition of endowing public foundations and giving back to communities. Business in Australia is nothing else but mean-spirited and selfish in comparison.

And thirdly, our educational system is intensely state driven, top down compared to what we saw in the U.S. Although it was interesting to compare their shift towards more state control while we are shifting somewhat to more local involvement.

These qualification paint a somewhat gloomy picture, but against them I see two great opportunities.

And this is the last trail I would like to explore a little with you today.

The first opportunity lies with what is already in place in some of our schools. And here I mean the work done by the Priority Country Area Program - or at least its Northern incarnation, for it is the one I know about.

Northern PCAP has laid the foundations in many of its member schools for School at the Centre to take hold. Many SatC projects have their analogues in our northern PCAP schools. The understanding of the importance of place is being developed.

School at the Center will add a stronger educational reasoning for these activities and bed them more firmly into the curriculum.

The second opportunity lies with something new that is happening in our schools.

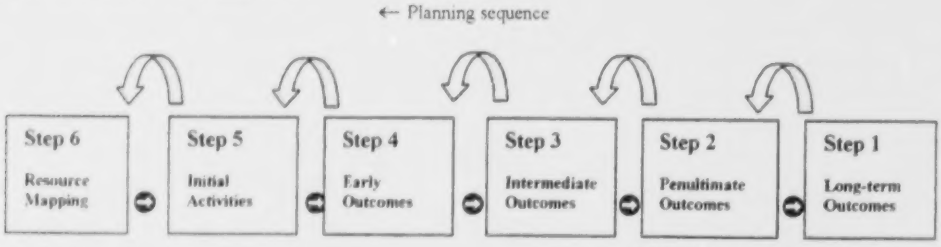
This is an exciting point in time for SatC, as our pilot project is being introduced into North Queensland at the same time as new curriculum materials are being introduced into schools - and there is an amazing synergy possible between the two.

But could I backtrack a little so you can appreciate why I see the opportunity as being so great?

What I might term 'normal' community development is often based on an initiative or action of some kind - a beaut idea, someone's dream ... this will fix it! - and it is predicated on an assumption that there is a linear track from action to positive outcomes, one will flow naturally from the other. This jellyfish will make a difference.

Traditional school curriculum had a similar reasoning. If we teach the following things X,Y,Z, then, unproblematically, good educational outcomes will result.

A different approach, what is called a 'Theory of Change Approach' by the Aspen Institute in the U.S. in their work on community development, advocates starting a planning process by defining the outcomes we want first. We then work back from that end product to piece together the most appropriate way of getting from where we are now to where we want to be.



Fulbright-Anderson et al, 1998.

School at the Centre is strongly focused on planning for outcomes, and indeed, some people refer to this process as an Outcomes Based Approach and it is this idea that lies at the core of the new curriculum being introduced in Queensland.

Teachers, in planning their work for a term or a year, work back to identify the steps they are going to take in getting to an *outcome* from where they - actually, their students - are now.

Where they (the students) are now, is another way of saying *their context.* Rural context is a focus of SatC, so you can begin to appreciate why we at SatC are so interested in the new curriculum materials - they have *context* and *outcomes based planning* in common.

And if we go the next step of removing the boundaries of classroom walls from considerations of how to get from *the where we are now* to *where we want to be*, there is a real possibility of moving into learning situations in the community that are more meaningful and *authentic* and which can make a contribution to community.

The new Queensland curriculum materials allow space for this development to occur.

And so our trail has come back to the research findings on what causes the enhancement of learning evident in SatC and similar programs.

Authentic pedagogy has three essential elements:
construction of knowledge,
disciplined inquiry,
value beyond school.

(Newmann and Wehlage, 1994)

It is the authenticity of the learning situation, the construction of knowledge from what is already known in a rigorous and disciplined way, and its application beyond the school walls that sets SatC apart.

And being specifically focused on rural communities, in my opinion, lends weight to the need to trial the program in Australian conditions - something we are about to do.

Area Schools Conference
Adelaide, South Australia.
12th August, 2001.

Come walk some trails

Not so long ago I was in the sandhills country in Western Nebraska, and after a long day visiting schools there, my host and I sat down for a relaxing evening drink. I will always remember the quiet invitation he extended to me - his way of reflecting on what we had seen - and I use his words to you. Come walk some trails with me.

The first trail I would like to explore is one about how we think about rural Australia. You and I know quite a deal about rural Australia. Like you, I have been a teacher in a rural area - in fact, other than for a very small time, my whole teaching career was in rural places. So we both know that rural is a complex thing to define, full of contradictions and diversity.

Rural is not a disadvantaged place, as often-depicted in deficit views of where you and I live. Nor is it the emotional heartland of heroic country myth.

Rather it is a mix of the romantic, of economic struggle and intransigent poverty, of undue dependency and at the same time of self-reliance, of schism between country and city while at the same time being seen as a place for rejuvenation and recuperation from the stress of daily living. In short, a complexity every bit as great as could be found anywhere, and perhaps even greater than can be found in most cities.

It is the failure to truly appreciate this complexity that adds to the challenges being faced by rural people.

Often, policy responses are piecemeal and take a simplistic binary - farm or welfare - view. Resources aimed at responding to either opportunity or need are constrained, something often exacerbated by bureaucratic service silos. And the paucity of rewards for initiatives, and of time to celebrate rural achievements, leads to a running down of optimism and self-reliance and a rise in both dependency and despondency.

Many different answers have been forthcoming to assist in meeting the challenges facing rural communities. One answer comes in the form of motivating consultants and expert facilitators - some with a near religious fervour - who can inspire communities to trade on their strengths and take hold of their own futures. Others demand a greater role of government. Views about what should or could be done range from the pragmatic to the fanciful. And there are even those who seem content to craft for themselves a victim status, effectively throwing to others responsibility for succour and rescue.

Community self help

In amongst all this, there has been a rising tide of rhetoric about community self-revitalisation. It is based on a broad assumption that, given the appropriate skills, local people can solve a significant number of their own problems and recognise and take advantage of opportunities in their midst.

While the jury is still out on how effective this community led ticket will be, particularly to rural regeneration - anecdotal evidence of success taken in isolation does not prove universal success - it remains an enticing prospect, and in a terrain largely devoid of other possibilities, one worth pursuing.

And what skills are these that could pave the way for community regeneration?

Murray and Dunn (1996) have identified five broad skill categories. The first, and recognised almost universally by commentators on community self help programs, is the vital role of leadership.

The second and third skills are about relationship building - mediation and conflict resolution, and group processes in general - while the fourth and fifth skill groups revolve around ways in which people can articulate a common vision for the future and call in assistance to convert aspirations to action.

In brief, this is an outline of what has become termed Community Capacity Building.

Youth involvement with CCB

Most Community Capacity Building initiatives have as their target audience adult members of the community. This approach runs the risk of becoming almost exclusively reactive in nature with the trail we are on running into a loop of repetition as new comers to a community, lacking exposure to CCB, need to be familiarised with CCB skills.

Surely we need the people who will form the communities of the future to have community building skills.

This notion stands in stark contrast to comments that some have made about current educational practices and the way students are involved with community issues.

> Educators and reformers often worry that today's students spend too much of their time simply absorbing - and then reproducing - information transmitted to them... Students can earn credits, good grades and high test scores, they say, demonstrating a kind of mastery that frequently seems trivial, contrived or meaningless outside the school.
>
> Newmann et al, 1995

This is a criticism made even more pointedly about education in rural places:

> In many rural communities, schools have become the vehicles for educating people to leave, fulfilling the prophecy that these places are doomed to poverty, decline, and despair.
>
> Nachtigal, 1998

As you can see, I am stepping out into another trail - a trail that takes us past the loop of recurrent reactive skilling of adults in CCB - to a trail that opens new vistas for consideration for community capacity building. It is a trail that includes young people and schools. And we are not alone. It is a trail that others are also walking.

The School at the Centre Trail

Some of the companions on this trail, who work directly with schools in this broad field of CCB (although most would not use this label to describe their work), include such initiatives as PACERS, Foxfire, REAL, and School at the Center. I use these U.S. examples as I know them best, but have to acknowledge that there are many other such initiatives including some I do know about and many I am still discovering here in Australia.

I am particularly interested in the School at the Center program and would like to share with you something about that initiative.

School at the Center brings together a number of different lines of thought. It rests comfortably with Constructivist philosophy, it is amenable to the move towards outcomes based education, it has a rural focus, it encourages consideration of community capacity building skills, it ... but I am getting ahead of myself. Let me start closer to the beginning.

The School-at-the-Center Project grew out of the economic development efforts of the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, Nebraska. The Center for Rural Affairs was formed in 1973 by rural Nebraskans concerned about the role of public policy in the decline of family farms and rural communities.

The Center for Rural Affairs published a document in 1992 that stated the philosophy and underpinning understandings that saw the School-at-the Center Project flower into the force it is today. It is part of a multi-facetted approach to community renewal that is being pursued across Nebraska, inspired by a number of political and other decision-makers including the then Lieutenant Governor of Nebraska.

The core statement for School-at-the-Center is that at least 20% of the curriculum should be an exploration of

> *the Great Plains culture in music, the arts, literature, and the folk arts, local environmental and economic issues and local vocations.*

Expressed as a more general statement, the School at the Center vision suggests students study place to become stewards of their community's environment and culture; preservers of their community's history; and builders of their community's future.

In other words, School at the Center is one of several initiatives that can be found in various places across the world that orient around a teaching and learning philosophy that comes under the label of 'place based education'. SatC is particularly focused on rural places, both the immediate locality and the broader rural milieu.

This place-based philosophy about education is not new. It can be traced back throughout many past deliberations about what contributes to good educational practice. Rousseau saw the immediate locality as a lens for disciplinary engagement. And to show the broad relevance of the idea across cultures we need to go no further than the work of Paolo Freire in South America or Julius Nyerere in Africa. But there

is also a growing volume of more recent work and I make particular reference to the writings of Paul Theobald and Paul Nachtigal.

School at the Center, and especially the planned Australian iteration of the program, moves beyond being merely another example of place-based education by adding another facet to its implementation in the classroom. School at the Center strongly encourages schools and their students to use the curriculum to make a conscious contribution back to their host community.

The Australian School at the Centre trail

There has been a deal of interest at both the federal and individual state levels in some of the rural initiatives in Nebraska. A keynote speaker at the 1999 Regional Summit was from Nebraska. Indeed, in the last few years, he, and others from Nebraska, have spoken at conferences in several Australian states.

Two people associated with the Nebraskan School at the Center program spoke at the 1999 Positive Rural Futures Conference in Queensland and were later invited to a seminar involving Priority Country Area Program schools in North Queensland. During that visit it became obvious that there were many similarities between what was being done at local PCAP schools and what the School at the Center program was achieving in the U.S.

Also, it allowed a long overdue link to be made with the Rural Education Research and Development Centre at my university (part of the School of Education at James Cook University of North Queensland). RERDC has both a close relationship with PCAP and with several other U.S. place-based initiatives. There were strong friends in common.

Shortly after this, a proposal to trial the SatC program in an Australian setting was floated and after some detailed pre-assessment of the appropriateness of the program for Australian conditions, funding was obtained from the Department of Transport and Regional Services to begin a pilot project in volunteer PCAP schools in North Queensland.

The project is being run in three phases. The first is an information gathering and dissemination phase, the second a detailed planning phase in the volunteer schools, and the third an implementation and assessment phase. And while the pilot project is nominally now in phase two, in practice, there is quite a deal of overlap between phases.

Twelve schools have volunteered to be involved in the pilot project and they range from tiny one teacher schools to larger P-12 schools, as well as stand alone primary and high schools. All are rural schools.

The schools have also been encouraged to elect their level of involvement and this can range from a single teacher with a single class right through to a major school and community collaborative effort.

But again, I am getting ahead of myself.

After the Nebraskan trail

Part of phase one included visits to Nebraska to gain first-hand experience of the School at the Center program in schools over there, and a return visit from the program director in Nebraska to, in turn, gain first-hand knowledge of PCAP schools in North Queensland.

These visits confirmed the degree of similarity between rural Nebraska and our North Queensland rural schools. The work being done was similar, the commitment of teachers was as great, the challenges and opportunities were much the same.

In brief, the original assessment that the School at the Center program was transferable to an Australian situation was confirmed.

However, there were important qualifications recognised.

There was a noticeable difference in the sense of community and self-reliance between the U.S and Australian communities visited.

U.S. schools appeared to have greater access to private philanthropic funds, while our schools were government dependent.

And, worryingly, students at the SatC schools we visited appeared more engaged in learning than students in some of the schools we visited over here. I do not advance any explanation for this but mention it as a variable that may affect the transferability of the program.

Finally, it was also obvious that the School at the Center program is not a quick fix initiative. The degree to which the philosophy was woven into school activities and curriculum, the involvement of community with SatC school, the types of projects that were being done or considered, all spoke of a long development and a level of comfort with the program that could not be gained overnight.

It is with these insights that SatC North Queensland is progressing to phase two - a planning phase that, even in the pilot project, will continue up to 2002.

Side tracks

Every trail has its side tracks, and we have become aware of several, more so after a spate of national publicity for our pilot project. So let me lay to rest some misconceptions about School at the Center.

School at the Center is not about creating a folk curriculum. School at the Center fully appreciated the need for rural students to be capable in today's world. This is one reason for the 20% guideline for contextualisation to place. Looked at another way, nearly 30% of Australians live in rural areas, so surely it is not too much to ask that they can see themselves in 20% of the curriculum, remembering also that School at the Center sees rural place not only in terms of individual locality but also rural milieu - rural ways of life.

The 20% guide also means that teachers can focus on those areas of the curriculum where contextualisation will result in enhancement of educational outcomes. Education and learning will become more relevant and real, and engagement at a deeper level will be encouraged. Further, that learning will have application and recognition beyond classroom walls in situations meaningful to both students and their community.

Finally, while School at the Center was originally conceived with a community development focus, it has moved beyond that as a prime function. In fact, early startling successes of SatC and like programs in enhancing student learning has led to a deal of research effort to explain the effects.

Two characteristics of these initiatives have been recognised as contributors to their success. One - described as *authentic pedagogy* - is now a term familiar to many educators, the other, yet to make a major impact in Australia, has been labelled *consequential learning.*

Both are integral parts of School at the Center.

Boulevards

You have followed some trails with me, from the trail of community led rural regeneration and the skills that could facilitate that process, down a newer trail that includes schools and students in those activities.

The trail then followed more closely the work of the School at the Center program as one initiative in this field, and whilst travelling that path, took some time to glance at some side tracks.

Our trail has now intersected with a major pathway, a veritable boulevard of educational thought that ties together many of the grassroots components of School at the Center.

It includes current thoughts about community in schools, of constructivist philosophy, of outcomes focused planning, of the building of community in general, of the role of Social Capital, of learning for life and life-long learning, and of deep engagement in the learning process, and of learning that is of real consequence to the learner.

Ivan Searston
Project Director
School at the Centre Pilot Project
Rural Education Research and Development Centre
James Cook University
North Queensland

Reading List:

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Murray, Michael and Dunn, Larry (1996) *Revitalising Rural America.* West Sussex, England: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Newmann, Fred E. (1996), *Authentic Achievement.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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Theobald, Paul (1997), *Teaching the Commons.* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

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www.sedl.org for details of the *Thriving Together CD.*

Adelaide Area Schools Conference.
12-08-2001.

Possibilities:

It appears that there are several schools that have some 'specialty' in their vocational education offerings. For example, Cowell has the aquaculture specialty, one of the Riverland schools has had a farm bequeathed (given?) to them, several schools have some form of viticulture/wine making specialty, one school had avionics of some form, and I think I heard that one school had or was close to a beef farm.

Also, I was told that several schools had small boarding facilities attached to them.

Add to this the discussion about immersion style courses - that is, flat out, nothing else for two to four weeks - and the intellectual property that some schools have in the knowledge of how these courses can be delivered.

There appears to be the chance of a new look at vocational delivery through a mix of these features.

1. Schools continue to develop their specialty/niche at which they are best. Other schools do not try to needlessly duplicate the same specialty but pursue their own from an industrial skills list most suited for their locality and of interest to students generally.

2. The school timetable is planned so that at mid-year (or what the most suitable time for everyone is) all students involved in vocational education move into a block release just for the vocational selection they have individually made.

3. At this time, students will transfer to the school that offers that specialty for an intensive 'immersion' course in that vocational area. Note the timetable trade-off necessary before during and after the immersion experience.

4. Students are accommodated at the small boarding facilities at the schools that have them, or billeted out, or other arrangement made for accommodation.

Rationale:

1. Students are grouped into interest areas and sent to the school with the best ability to meet those interests.
2. Students do not have to leave home and their home school for extensive periods of time. The 'block release' is short and intensive.
3. Some preliminary orientation work can be done at the home schools eg. Occupational Health and Safety, information gathering and preparation etc. so when it is immersion time, the preparation has been done.
4. Students brought up to full competency using industry trainers as well as teaching staff during the immersion phase. (Note that industry trainers are more generally able to give their time over a short burst than working to a school timetable).
5. It is acknowledged that competency will decline after the course, but this is true whether it is an immersion or a long drawn out full year course. However,

immersion more closely duplicates the sudden learning curve a new employee must face in the first few weeks at a job to meet the employer's expectation of productivity as soon as possible.

6. Students can attend immersion courses at schools that offer their vocational interest whether they be rural* or urban schools. In fact, some city students may be attracted to rural schools for their immersion. In other words, it is the specialty not the geographic divide that influences attendance, and many of the specialties can only be offered in rural places. Note the rural focus would be a pleasant change from the rural deficit view of what can be done in rural schools.
7. Some immersion courses could be planned in conjunction with RTOs. For example a hairdressing immersion could be offered at TAFE.
8. Immersion courses could be offered at different levels (Cert I, Cert II etc) and different grades say from year 9 upwards. This could bulk up numbers at individual immersion courses if necessary.
9. By providing immersion courses with preparatory and follow-up support, a range of industry areas might be targeted that would not normally be considered. For example, one school might become the Local Government specialist (and I acknowledge I am in a Local Government Advisory Board) - but you get the idea - especially after the initial system is up and running.
10. Funding could be a problem, but a new idea like this could interest DETYA, at least for a trial.
11. Insurance etc could also prove a stumbling block but dual school enrolments could answer the actual school time both at the home school and at the immersion school. Transport to and from might have to be a parental responsibility as also accommodation - but surely this can be subsidised via DETYA for example along the lines of remote students attending a voc course similar to a traineeship.
12. By offering the immersion to students as young as Year 9 some of the early attrition of disaffected youth might be caught. Offering immersion at schools also detours the age barriers for apprenticeship/traineeships and school work experience programs.

Perhaps the Area Schools Principals Association could be the sponsoring vehicle for this form of initiative - it could be valuable intellectual property on a wider (even world) stage if the system was made to run. Also, each specialty and how it is managed and operated at its school would also fall into the category of valuable intellectual property. -- Just a thought.

* At a practical level, I would work only with Area Schools at the beginning. The people I met at the Area Schools Conference seemed to be ready to explore new ideas.

The Northern Priority Country Area Program

and

The Rural Education, Research and Development Centre, James Cook University of North Queensland.

present

School at the Centre

An Information Paper for a Conference
August, 2001.

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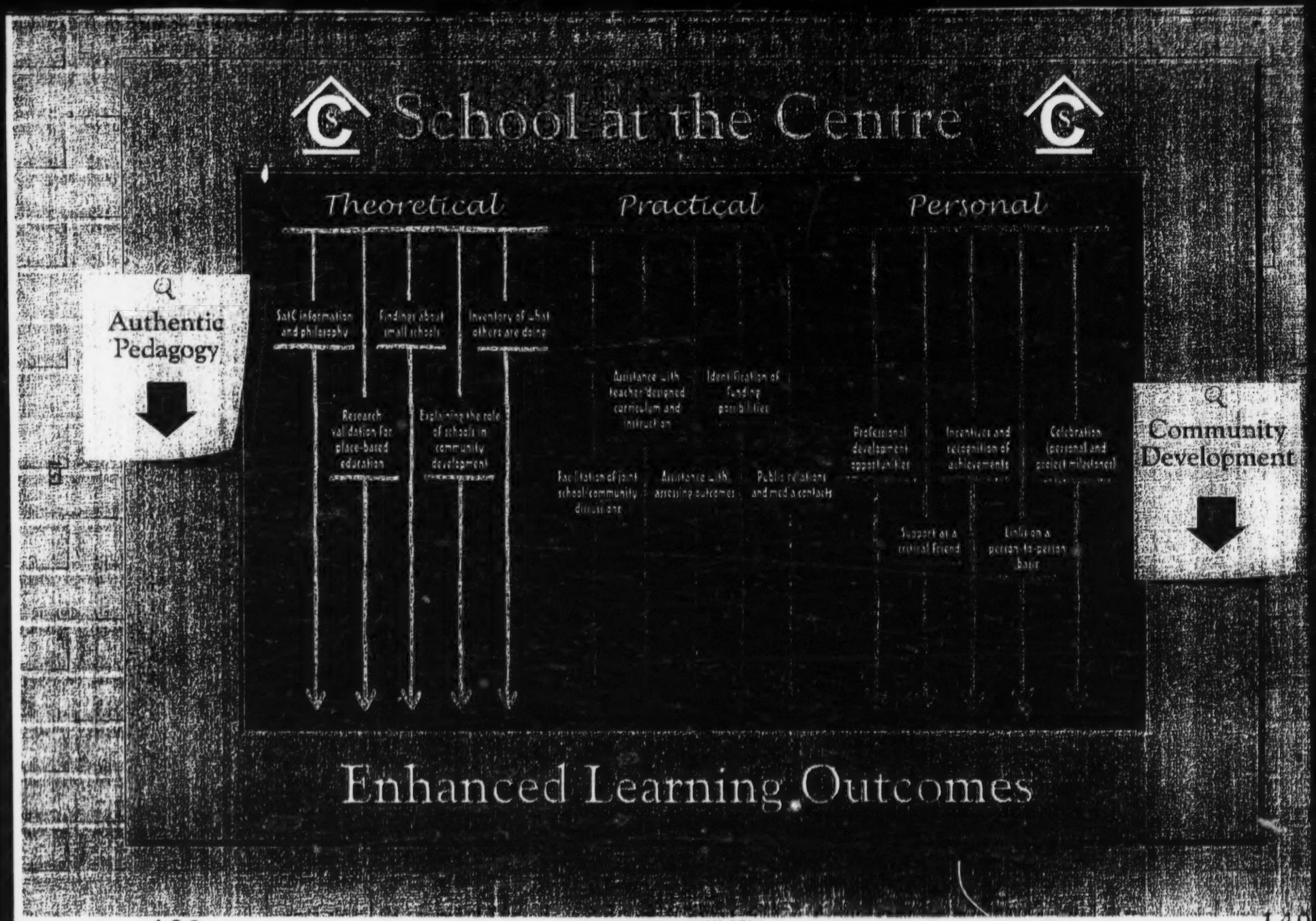
Stages of Concern about an Innovation.

Some time ago, researchers at the University of Texas, in an effort to understand how people - more specifically teachers - respond to innovation and change, proposed a six point scale of 'concerns' that appeared to track how people responded to meeting new situations.

As many PCAP activities are innovative, these 'Stages of Concern' may be of interest to those involved in such projects.

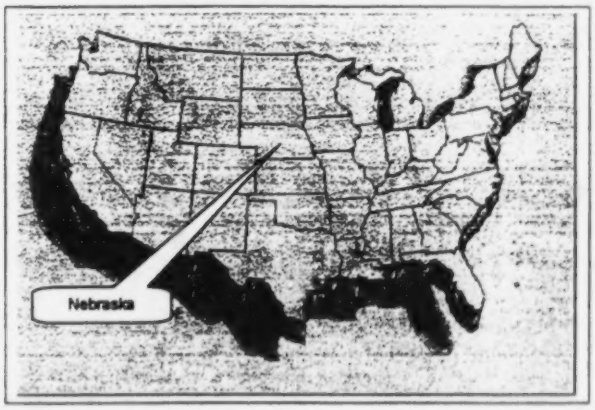
Stage	*Definition*
0	**AWARENESS: Little concern about or involvement with the innovation.**
1	**INFORMATIONAL: A general awareness of the innovation and interest in learning more detail. The person seems unworried about self in relation to the innovation. Interest shown in substantive aspects of the innovation in a selfless manner such as general characteristics, effects, and requirements for use.**
2	**PERSONAL: Individual is uncertain about the demands of the innovation and personal adequacy to meet those demands and the role that might be played in the innovation. This can include analysis of the reward structure in the person's employing organisation, and decision-making and potential conflicts with existing structures or personal commitment. Financial and status implications of the program for self and colleagues may also be considered.**
3	**MANAGEMENT: Attention is focused on the processes and tasks of using the innovation and the best use of information and resources. Issues relating to efficiency, organising, management, scheduling, and time demands are utmost.**
4	**CONSEQUENCE: Attention focuses on the impact of the innovation on students within the immediate sphere of influence of the teacher. The focus is on relevance of the innovation for students, evaluation of student outcomes, including performance and competencies, and changes needed to increase student outcomes.**
5	**COLLABORATION: The focus is on coordination and cooperation with others regarding use of the innovation.**
6	**REFOCUSING: The focus is on an exploration of more useful benefits from the innovation, including the possibility of major changes or replacement with a more powerful alternative. Teacher has definite ideas about alternatives to the proposed or existing form of the innovation.**


School at the Centre
Theoretical
Practical
Personal
Authentic Pedagogy
Community Development
SatC information and philosophy
Findings about small schools
Inventory of what others are doing
Research validation for place-based education
Explaining the role of schools in community development
Assistance with teacher-designed curriculum and instruction
Identification of funding possibilities
Facilitation of joint school/community discussions
Assistance with assessing outcomes
Public relations and media contacts
Professional development opportunities
Incentives and recognition of achievements
Celebration (personal and project milestones)
Support as a critical friend
Links on a person-to-person basis
Enhanced Learning Outcomes

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

1. What is School at the Center?

The School-at-the-Center Project grew out of the economic development efforts of the Center for Rural Affairs in Walthill, Nebraska. The Center for Rural Affairs was formed in 1973 by rural Nebraskans concerned about the role of public policy in the decline of family farms and rural communities.



The Center for Rural Affairs published a document in 1992 that stated the philosophy and underpinning understandings that saw the School-at-the Center Project flower into the force it is today. It is part of a multi-facetted approach to community renewal that is being pursued across Nebraska, inspired by a number of political and other decision-makers including the then Lieutenant Governor of Nebraska, Maxine Moul.

The core statement for School-at-the-Center is that at least 20% of the curriculum should be an exploration of

the Great Plains culture in music, the arts, literature, and the folk arts, local environmental and economic issues and local vocations.

In other words, School at the Center is one of several initiatives that can be found in various places across the world that orient around a teaching and learning philosophy that comes under the label of 'place based education'. SatC is particularly focused on rural places.

This place-based philosophy about education is not new. It can be traced back throughout many past deliberations about what contributes to good educational practice. Rousseau saw the immediate locality as a lens for disciplinary engagement. And to show the broad relevance of the idea across cultures we need to go no further than the work of Paolo Freire in South America or Julius Nyerere in Africa. But there is also a growing volume of more recent work and I make particular reference to the writings of Paul Theobald and Paul Nachtigal.

School at the Center, and especially the planned Australian iteration of the program, moves beyond being merely another example of place-based education by adding another facet to its implementation in the classroom. **School at the Center strongly encourages schools and their students to use the curriculum to make a conscious contribution back to their host community.**

> The identification of where a contribution might be made flows quite naturally from the School at the Center planning process used with schools, teachers, community members and students. This is because of the attention given to writing into the curriculum those characteristics of place that can act as the vehicle to convey the learning experiences that will generate the educational outcomes being sought in that curriculum. In the process of writing these strategies into the curriculum, it is our experience that those involved soon identify local issues with which they would like to be involved. And learning becomes more real and pertinent.

However, School at the Center does not go down the track of creating a 'folk curriculum', a criticism that has been levelled at some place-based educational initiatives. SatC is well aware that students have to take their place effectively in a modern and increasingly global world - hence the 20% guideline.

Further, a quick reconsideration of the goal of School at the Center stated above, shows that place is interpreted not only as the specific locality where the school is sited, but also the broader rural milieu. The 20% guideline becomes even more supportable when this is realised.

Looked at another way, in Australia, more than 30% of the population lives in rural places (as distinct from urban and regional provincial centres) so the suggestion that they should see themselves and their lifestyles and interests in 20% of the curriculum is not unreasonable by any stretch of the imagination..

So to recapitulate:

Schools at the Center (in Australia we use the *Centre* spelling - in fact, the spellings are an indication of which program we are discussing) is one of several examples of place-based education. SatC unashamedly focuses on rural place, and is characterised by two core statements:

> ***A target of 20% of the overall curriculum should reflect rural place, both as immediate locality and the broader rural milieu***
>
> ***There should be a conscious effort to use this curriculum to make a contribution to the local community.***

2. Why get involved/why bother?

It is our experience so far that, in discussion with teachers and others about the School at the Centre philosophy, linkages are rapidly made between what good teachers are already doing and what School at the Centre encourages.

> Good teaching regularly uses the strategy of building on prior knowledge that a student has - including experiential knowledge gained from place - and tries to make the new ideas being covered in the curriculum more pertinent and real by showing their applicability within the scope of what a student is already familiar with.

Often, it is a 'gut feeling' that drives teachers into using something from local experience as the vehicle for teaching and learning. More often than not, they find this approach works - it engages students better, encourages reflective thinking and cognitive demand, it decreases behavioural issues, and those involved tend to find it more personally rewarding.

Among other things, while School at the Centre requires a higher level of commitment to the use of place in education, it also offers explanations for these gut feelings. School at the Centre gives answers to the questions that follow naturally at this point in discussions - *Why should I/we get involved? Why bother?*

School at the Centre offers three broad reasons:

(a) there is increasing evidence/research that points to enhanced educational outcomes when place is used as a vehicle for teaching and learning.

(b) there is evidence of increasing community awareness of the school and what it does when the community receives a contribution from the school. This results in greater support for the school, learning in general, and community vitality.

(c) there are rewards at a personal level for those involved, be it teachers, community people or students.

Each of these reasons will now be developed a little further.

1.
Some of the strongest recent statements about educational outcomes being enhanced by attention to place come from research conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Using the terminology of *authentic pedagogy*, Fred Newmann and his associates added to our understanding of what makes good educational practice by identifying three essential elements involved:

> *active construction of knowledge*
> *disciplined inquiry*
> *value beyond school.*

The links to School at the Centre are obvious.

2.
Work coming out of the University of Alabama where the term *consequential learning* has been coined, also looks at the educational outcomes of place-based education, in particular from their PACERS program. Learning that has consequences that the student can see and which impact personally on the student in some definite way is likely to be more meaningful and engage a student more.

Education that has relevance to place is more likely to foster *consequential learning.*

3.
Further, there are the experiences and anecdotal records available from School at the Center. The web site is a good starting point both for professional papers and for compendiums of what others have done.

4.
Another strand of research relates to assessment. Criticism has often been levelled at schools for teaching that aims only at transmitting knowledge that is merely absorbed and reproduced

> *Students can earn credits, good grades and high test scores ... demonstrating a kind of mastery that frequently seems trivial, contrived or meaningless outside the school.*
>
> Newmann, 1995.

This is a concern that has also been raised in a recent report to the Queensland Education Department (28th June, 2001). At a wider scale, Grant Wiggins' *Educative Assessment* explores this topic further. Assessment that truly measures what has been learnt must have a reality component - students should be able to demonstrate use of the knowledge in some application, or in some new form, or to answer some new need. Many of these assessment scenarios can only be generated by appealing to some aspect of place.

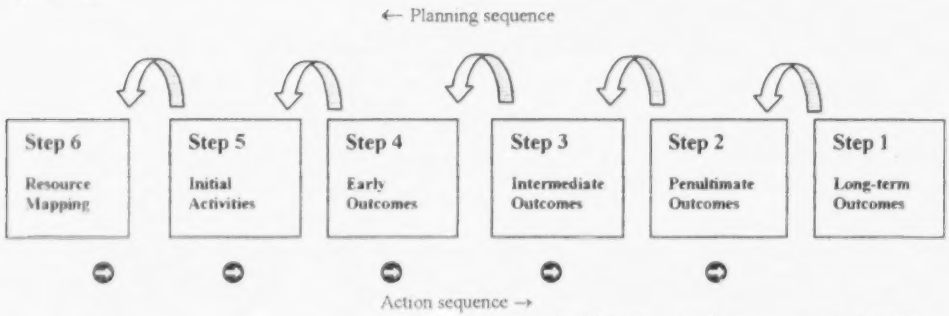
5.
School at the Centre is strongly focused on the outcomes of the educative process, and therefore has a particular resonance with the moves towards outcomes-based education that are current in several of the Australian state educational systems.

This extract from the Queensland *Years 1-10 Curriculum Framework for Education Queensland Schools Policy and Guidelines* document emphasises the role of outcomes to curriculum planning:

> Core learning outcomes should form the basis of **curriculum planning**. Outcomes are the starting-point for decisions about appropriate student learning experiences. Learning experiences may enable student demonstration of outcomes from within strands, across strands and across key learning areas.
>
> (p.6)

There is an interesting link between *outcomes based education* and *planning for community development* in work being done by the Aspen Institute in the U.S. Their 'Theory of Change Approach' to community development advocates starting a planning process by first defining the outcomes wanted. The planning process then works back from that end product to piece together the most appropriate way of getting from where participants are now (the present situation, the place) to where they want to be (the outcomes).

School at the Centre planning at the school level is very similar. The outcomes we want to get to are broadly defined by curriculum statements. The most appropriate way of getting there is to incorporate some elements of place in the journey.



Fulbright-Anderson et al, 1998.

So the link between *School at the Centre* and *Outcomes Based Education* not only resonates with current educational thinking about curriculum planning, but also finds parallels in the way planning is being thought about in the field of community development.

And it is the link between schools and community and the role that schools could play in contributing to vitality of place that is the next reason for being involved that will be considered.

(b) Community benefits

While it is now realised that enhanced educational outcomes that flow from giving attention to place in the curriculum lie at the core of School at the Center and explain much of the success of the program, School at the Center was originally conceived around the role schools could play in the renewal of rural communities. This remains a strong focus of School at the Centre.

Perhaps John Sergiovanni, long acknowledged as a leader in the role of management and organisational functions of education and schools, makes the link between schools and their communities most succinctly

> *Though most principals, superintendents, and teachers have a desire to do better and are working as hard as they can to provide a quality education to every student they serve, the road is rough and the going is slow.*
> *The lead villain in this frustrating drama is the loss of community in our schools and in society itself.*
>
> T J Sergiovanni, 1999.

Paul Theobald in his *Teaching the Commons* lays a great deal of the blame for this loss of community, especially in rural places, on the urban industrial curriculum ubiquitous in our schools:

> *if the goal* [of the school] *is to outfit children for successful careers in an industrial, political economy, then inattention to place becomes both understandable and predictable. It contributes to our excessively mobile society, wherein career must come before family and where propensity for unconditional commitment is almost impossible to witness.*
>
> *... undue focus on the self in our society, and the predictable result is disintegrating neighbourhoods and a vanishing sense of community.*
>
> Theobold, 1997.

To redress this, part of the work of School at the Centre revolves around the necessity to prepare students for a civic role in a democracy, and as part of this, to express this role in building their own communities. A second issue is to counter, in part at least, the marginalisation of place, especially rural place, in both government policy and in school curriculum in particular.

This marginalisation is yet another product of the intellectually vacuous message that the decline of rural communities is inevitable because of 'progress' or 'inevitability'. It is a product of human decisions and can be altered. For if we continue on our present trajectory, especially in the dominant education model of the last decades, the scathing words of Edward Allsworth Ross in 1922 will be all too true

> *rural areas* [will become] *fished out ponds* [of talent] *populated chiefly by bullheads and suckers.*

Instead, there is increasing evidence that, given the assistance to do so, many rural communities can make a much better go of taking responsibility for their own viability, for creating their own vitality. To be sure, this may not ensure that all will survive, but the miasma of inevitability of decline and extinguishment will be penetrated.

Said another way

> *all communities have needs and we must begin to enculturate youth into an ethic of shouldering responsibility for meeting those needs ... it has the best chance of catching on in rural America where size is still manageable and where lingering vestiges of a sense of community yet remain.*
>
> Theobald, 1997.

In answering this call, there is also the direct benefit to both youth and community, for one of the most pressing problems faced by society today will be addressed:

> *Young people have become segregated from the structure of responsibilities and rewards of productive adult society.*
> *As a result, children and adolescents face historically unprecedented challenges in finding a sense of purpose in their schooling tasks and a sense of connection with adult roles of authority and responsibility.*
>
> Hoffer and Colemen, 1990.

This lack of purpose and connection is interpreted a different way by Jack Shelton as

> *In schools not connected to place, kids don't have a role and they're anonymous, the teachers are anonymous, the place is anonymous. I don't believe morality is a function of anonymity.*
>
> Shelton, 2000.

If rural schools abrogate having any role in this renewal and in the integration of rural youth into rural place, they stand accused of being implicit in that decline and that disengagement. They will be confirmed as part of a government system that could be accused of discrimination against rural people, and which therefore could not (morally at least) discount the needs of rural people, as seems to be the more common recent tack, given that policy has created the situation today. It is interesting to note that such an assertion of discrimination against rural people is about to be tested in one state in the U.S. where a class action is being prepared against that state's legislature.

(c) Personal reasons

Faced with new or expanded ideas, it is just human nature to wonder what might be in it 'for me'. Will it mean more work that will go unrewarded? Will I gain professional satisfaction? Will it enhance my career prospects? These and many other personal queries can be spawned. They are entirely natural and they extend not only to teachers, but to community people who may become involved and to students who are the essential elements of programs such as School at the Centre, yet who are often left unconsidered.

I will mention only a couple of the personal rewards. Firstly, there is support, advice and encouragement from outside the system in which the teacher works. Recent research on successful school based initiatives conducted by the University of Tasmania has identified the stand-out importance of the external critical, independent, credible friend.

Secondly, there is the potential for personal rewards of a tangible nature. The teacher exchange program presently being pursued is such an example. While this is primarily targeted at teachers, the extension to other groups might not be impossible at a later time.

Thirdly, there is the curriculum material, some already developed, and for the Queensland pilot project, in the process of being developed. Along side this is a database of examples of implementation.

Further, there are the personal contacts possible between teachers, communities and students elsewhere who are involved in School at the Centre.

These personal reasons, combined with the research validation and the focus on the future of rural communities together make a powerful case for becoming involved/why bother with School at the Centre.

3. School at the Centre - a pilot project in Australia.

(i) Background

James Cook University, through the Rural Education Research and Development Centre (RERDC) based in Townsville, North Queensland, has long had a strong interest in education in rural areas. RERDC has made a number of linkages with other universities across the world - in Scotland, Norway, the United States and New Zealand - who share a similar interest and commitment.

In the process of making these linkages and in convening a number of conferences about rural education, RERDC has taken a lead role in promoting the sharing of research and actions at an international level. This has made RERDC privy to a number of initiatives that revolve around the concept of place-based education , one example of which is the School at the Center.

In 1999, two people from the School at the Center in Nebraska, one being the Director of the program, spoke about the positive outcomes of the initiative in the United States, at the annual Queensland Positive Rural Futures conference.

Both these people were later involved in a seminar held in Ravenshoe, North Queensland, where local people were introduced to the School at the Center program in more detail. This seminar was organised by the Northern Priority Country Area Program (NPCAP).

> The close alignment of the focus of NPCAP, the work of the Rural Education Research and Development Centre at James Cook University, the aspirations of local rural people, and the objectives and rigorous educational foundations of the School at the Center program, came together in a submission to the Federal Department of Transport and Regional Services, seeking funding to trial the School at the Center program in Australia.

Funding for a small pilot project in North Queensland was approved in lateYR2000.

(ii) Choice of SatC

Why School at the Center and not one of the other similar initiatives?

Northern PCAP has laid the foundations in many of its member schools for School at the Centre to take hold. Many SatC projects in the United States have their analogues in our northern PCAP schools. The understanding of the importance of place is being developed across the northern PCAP schools.

Secondly, the School at the Center program has a rural focus. It is not primarily a disadvantaged or deficit model of intervention and it is not minority focused in the

sense of race or social class. This made it attractive as an initiative that would target mainstream rural communities and their schools.

This does not mean that School at the Center pays no heed to special communities - the work with the Mennonite community at Henderson, the First Nation communities in north east Nebraska, as well as with Latino clusters in urban Lincoln demonstrate the wider applicability of the program.

Rather, a conscious choice was made to restrict the proposed Australian pilot to mainstream rural communities. These included the most pragmatic of reasons.

(iii) The choice of Rural NPCAP schools

Firstly, there was the constraint of finances. The funding program that was targeted for support had an upper limit of $50000. This obviously meant the trial would have to be small to be achievable.

Secondly, the introduction of too many variables could defeat the purpose of a trial project - that of examining the transferability of the U.S. School at the Center program into Australian conditions. What better place to start than in the closest analogue to the American situation - mainstream rural communities in Australia. This would best allow for transferability to be judged without too many other distractions.

Thirdly, and here the reference to the PCAP communities is explained, it would be better to conduct the trial in communities that had degree of 'readiness' - communities that were already heading in the general direction of the School at the Center philosophy. The PCAP communities of North Queensland were in this situation.

And once the decision was made to target the mainstream PCAP communities and schools in North Queensland, another series of decision had to be made about which ones of the seventy plus PCAP schools and communities - again, funding was the constraint.

However, rather than identifying schools individually, characteristics of schools were used to ensure a wide representation of school types. The first characteristic used was school size to which other characteristics were added resulting in the following list:

One teacher school	2
Smallish primary school	2
Large primary school	1
Catholic Ed	2
SoDE	1
P-10 split campus	1
P-10 same campus	1
P-12	1
8-12 secondary	1

Further suggestions widened the list to include a private school, some schools outside the PCAP area, and rather than exclude cultural differences completely, some schools with a significant indigenous population.

Geographic spread was then used as a second overlay, and based primarily on cost of access, four geographic clusters were proposed. One was based around Cooktown, a second was on the Atherton Tablelands, a third around Charters Towers and a fourth at Collinsville. In all, this gave a total of just over 20 schools to canvass with School at the Centre information.

Cooktown cluster: Cooktown Rossville Lakeland Downs	**Charters Towers cluster:** SoDE Mingela Ravenswood Alliance of Charters Towers Schools Blackheath and Thornburgh College
Tableland cluster: Julatten Mt Molloy Herberton Irvinebank *plus* Babinda	**Collinsville cluster:** Collinsville High Collinsville Primary Scottsville St John Bosco

Lastly, the decision was also made that these schools should elect their level of involvement with the pilot program. Some schools, might, in fact, even elect not to take part.

Also underpinning this latter decision was research into ways in which people react to change and innovation. By allowing time for people to work through their 'stages of concern' and building in more time for adequate planning for implementation, it was felt that the core question posed in the pilot - is the School at the Center program transferable from the U.S. to the Australian milieu - could be answered effectively.

(iv) The pilot project timelines

The School at the Centre Pilot Project was designed for implementation in three phases.

The first phase was to be an information gathering and dissemination process; the second phase consisted of a planning stage where volunteer schools could work through areas of the curriculum where they felt most comfortable with undertaking contextualisation of the curriculum to introduce concepts of place; the third phase was the actual implementation.

The time line projected the completion of phase one by July 2001, phase two by end of the school year 2001, with implementation during 2002, although this was to remain flexible to suit the individual schools.

The completion of these three phases also provided three distinct points at which to assess the progress of the pilot project.

Phase one, the information gathering and dissemination stage, is now almost complete and the project is moving into the beginning of phase two.

4. Phase Two - planning for implementation

Experience so far indicates there are three differing starting points that teachers may move forward from when confronting the task of identifying issues that might begin the contextualisation process - the writing of place into the curriculum

(i) Using existing curriculum documents

The first is one that begins from the existing curriculum documents in a Key Learning Area. This material is scanned to find points in the documentation that specifically indicate links to locality.

A good example comes from the Time Continuity and Change strand in the Level 2 documentation in the recently released Study of Society and the Environment (SOSE) curriculum materials:

> **Study of Society and the Environment - Queensland Syllabus Years 1 - 10.**
>
> **Time, Continuity and Change - Level 2**
>
> **Core Learning Outcomes**
> TCC 2.1 Students explain different meanings about an event, artefact, story or symbol from different times.
>
> TCC 2.2 Students record changes and continuities in familiar settings using different devices.
>
> TCC 2.3 Students co-operatively evaluate how people have contributed to changes in the local environment.
>
> TCC 2.4 Students describe cause and effect relationships about events in familiar settings.
>
> TCC 2.5 Students identify similarities and differences between the experiences of family generations.

The links that can be made with the School at the Centre philosophy are obvious. There is firstly, the history of place and local people. Secondly, there is the modification of the environment over that time - a more scientific theme. Thirdly, there is the research focus that encourages inquiring minds about the local area.

If some public reporting of the students' work is added to this, for example, a report to the local Council on the environmental changes that have been found, the value of what students do is moved beyond the school and begins the contribution to the local community - in this case by contributing information - that is the second characteristic of School at the Centre curriculum developments.

The upper end of the same syllabus document encourages a great deal of critical thinking. Consider how rural issues could be incorporated into the following:

> **Study of Society and the Environment - Queensland Syllabus Years 1 - 10.**
>
> **Systems, Resources and Power - Level 6**
>
> **Core Learning Outcomes:**
> SRP 6 1 Students develop and test an hypothesis concerning a relationship between global economic and ecological systems.
>
> SRP 6 2 Students make practical suggestions for improving productivity and working conditions in an industry or business.
>
> SRP 6 3 Students advocate to influence Australia's role in future global economies or environments.
>
> SRP 6 4 Students communicate informed interpretations to suggest reforms to an economic, a political or a legal system.
>
> SRP 6 5 Students apply understandings of social justice and democratic process to suggest ways of improving access to economic and political power.

Making rurality an issue in this way illustrates the broader aspect of place based education - the milieu as well as the locality - that is espoused by School at the Centre.

From these examples, the point to be made is that curriculum documents already in existence are conducive to a School at the Centre approach, both from the narrower focus of local place and from the wider view of the rural milieu.

And while the SOSE Syllabus has been used to demonstrate the possibility because it is particularly amenable to such an approach, other Syllabus documents can also be scanned for points where locality - place based education and the contribution to local issues - can be incorporated into the writing of work programmes based on those syllabus materials.

(ii) What others have done

A second starting point, one that finds favour with another group of teachers, is to look at what others have done and translate that experience to the local situation.

This approach has a number of appeals, not the least of which is the huge range of activities from which to choose. However several other advantages are readily discernible.

The activities have been tried by someone else and have been successful (unsuccessful activities are seldom publicised); there would most likely be someone with experience of a chosen activity to contact for suggestions and support; the

activity would most likely carry with it some credibility in the eyes of school administrators - they are not 'going out on a limb' in support of an untried initiative.

A good starting point in North Queensland is to go to the NPCAP web site and examine projects that have received funding over the last few years. Not all reflect the School at the Centre philosophy, but a number of the projects do. The great advantage is that these projects are local ones, they fit in the local milieu and support would be local.

Another approach is to scan some of the place based education web sites for ideas. Obviously the School at the Center site in Nebraska should be visited but there are a number of additional sites and both PACERS and Foxfire would be high on the recommended list. Reference should also be made to Australian examples of which there are a number.

A third way of getting a handle on what others have done is to use categorised lists that others have produced as summaries or overviews of the range of initiatives that can be found. One such list was produced by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in Texas with the help of staff from a number of place-based educational initiatives including School at the Center. The following table is based on that work

Beautification
- conducting neighbourhood cleanups
- designing and creating community parks or museum
- creating community artwork

Community resources
- setting up a community centre
- publishing a community newspaper
- documenting local history
- documenting traditions and practices among the community's various groups
- preparing a brochure about local attractions
- working with volunteer fire and rescue departments

Education
- tutoring, mentoring or reading to younger students
- creating an outdoor learning environment
- developing skits or presentations on issues
- taking part in adult tutoring programs e.g. computer skills
- volunteering to monitor school facilities for after hours use

Entrepreneurial activities
- investigating local business opportunities
- setting up a small business
- surveying local business intentions

Environment
- monitoring weather conditions
- monitoring water quality
- creating wildlife refuge areas
- setting up a recycling centre

Health
- working with a health clinic
- conducting health inventories
- helping with Red Cross
- collecting for and visiting hospital patients
- visiting elderly

Social change
- registering voters
- writing letters about legislation
- researching and producing materials on specific issues

Social services
- helping to build or repair local housing
- adopting a senior citizen
- conducting charity drives
- planting a community garden
- raising funds for local causes

An even larger list is available in Lillian Stephens book *The Complete Guide to Learning Through Community Service*. And for those wishing to extend their professional qualifications, James Cook University through a partnership with two overseas universities offers an international Masters in Education that covers much of this work in detail.

Again, after some ideas are gleaned from what others have done, the next step is to seat these ideas into the relevant sections of the curriculum and bed that into the teacher's work program.

(iii) Using local knowledge

The third starting point, and one that suits teachers who have extensive local knowledge, is to use local knowledge as a starting point. A similar start can also be made from this point by tapping into people in the community who already have, or potentially can have, close associations with the school.

This approach is also the one more likely to have an easier path to community approval and endorsement - 'permission' - to carry out the contributory aspect of School at the Centre. This is an aspect of planning that is sometimes overlooked - that the community has to be receptive to a contribution made from the school.

It is also surprising to many people that, when local knowledge is used as the basis for contextualisation process, once an issue is identified, how many areas of the overall curriculum quickly become involved in the planning process.

The process also quickly gathers in a whole range of local people as well.

Not surprisingly, because of the direct and immediate links to the local community, School at the Center tends to favour this third starting point over the first two that have been discussed, albeit with a caveat. And that caveat is that those involved should have some understanding of the *community development process*.

However, in practice, all three starting points seldom remain distinct approaches as planning progresses. Elements of each approach are detectable in most initiatives.

Reading List:

http:// satc.unl.edu for details on School at the Center

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